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CODESRIA: 30 years of Scholarly Publishing

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Abstract

In this essay, the authors examine the role of CODESRIA in African knowledge production and distribution since its founding some three decades ago. The authors also discuss the motivation for the creation of CODESRIA, as well as the challenges, achievements, and promises of this pan African research organization in developing a culture of scholarly publishing and dissemination in the continent.

Key terms: CODESRIA, African scholarship, culture of scholarly publishing and dissemination, multidisciplinary social research

Résumé

Dans cet essai, les auteurs se penchent sur le rôle du CODESRIA dans la production de connaissances en Afrique et leur diffusion, depuis sa création il y a une trentaine d'années. Ils traitent également des facteurs qui ont motivé la fondation du CODESRIA, ainsi que des problèmes, réalisations et promesses de cet organisme de recherche panafricain qui contribue à forger une culture de publication et de dissémination des travaux de recherche sur le continent.

Mots clés : CODESRIA, recherche scientifique en Afrique, culture de publication et de dissémination des travaux de recherche, recherche sociale multidisciplinaire, publication sciences humaines

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Introduction

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) was created in 1973 for the purpose of promoting multidisciplinary social research which derives from and is relevant to the experience of the African continent and its peoples. This meant from the outset, a policy to encourage social scientific research on various aspects of life and society**.** It also entailed the development of a programme of student grants and fellowships designed to promote the cultivation of talent and a thirst for competitive and high quality scholarship (through methodology workshops, seminars, essays and dissertation competitions) among young and promising scholars. The council also strived to offer an outlet for the formulation and expression of African perspectives and scholarship and, in so doing, enabling a contribution to ongoing debates on the continent and the world through a scholarly publications programme. Over the years, CODESRIA's publications mission has evolved and crystallised to encompass the following objectives:

- Promoting greater visibility and competitiveness for African scholarship informed by perspectives that are organic to the concerns of the continent.
- Offering a forum for scholars in various disciplines and fields of the Social Sciences and Humanities in and on Africa to share research findings, debate perspectives, exchange ideas, and forge new dimensions of interconnections between theory and practice in the interest of African realities.
- Contributing to the development of a culture of scholarly publishing in Africa and, through this contribution, help to strengthen the institutional basis of scholarly publishing and knowledge production.
- Promoting excellence in publishing as well as the development of an African community of Social Science and Humanities scholars who cross-reference one another in active dialogue, debate and discussion on the manner in which scholarship is to understand, interpret and ultimately contribute towards desired social change in Africa.
- Encouraging knowledge production and dissemination by female scholars and younger academics both generally and**,** more especially, through books and special issues of journals that focus on themes targeting women and youth for contributions and readership.
- Encouraging the development of a reading and writing culture among African scholars, including support to younger scholars for the development of skills for academic publishing.

Why CODESRIA?

The creation of CODESRIA was also partly motivated by a perceived need for greater recognition and representation for what Africa and African social scientists had to offer in discourses where they were often reduced to passive observers whose role was to implement and not to think. The prevalent high rejection rate for African scholarship in Northern journals and books, for example, meant that African scholars had basically to choose between bending over backwards to accommodate debates whose origins and assumptions were at variance with the burning questions and concerns of their continent, or to create and sustain alternative outlets for their own research informed by greater relevance in theory and practice, and in tune with the diverse expectations and aspirations of Africans. Providing for a strong publications and dissemination component of CODESRIA was a clear indication that the founding fathers and mothers of this pan-African organisation had opted for independence of thought and scholarship**,** as well as a critical engagement with the African world.

CODESRIA's role, since its founding, has been to ensure that African social scientists and scholarship would not perish simply as a result of rejection by publishers elsewhere. The organization has also ensured that the general absence of university presses in the continent, or financially handicap, or the political situation in a number of regions in Africa would thwart the dreams of the scholarly community for independent critical publications on Africa by Africans. In this regard, it was expected that social scientists would have CODESRIA to rely on: a publisher that would be more understanding of the what, how, and why of their scholarship, without necessarily sacrificing scientific expectations.

One of the objectives of the publications policy states clearly that: 'Publications shall be of the highest scientific quality, achieved through a rigorous peer-review system sustained by African scholars and scholars of Africa.' The fact that CODESRIA was not just a publisher but also a sponsor of research was even more helpful. It encouraged scholars to apply for sponsored research at national, regional and continental levels, knowing that the outcome would be a publication. Scholars awarded research grants were expected to work with a view to having their results published, and were, therefore, encouraged to be rigorous and empirically grounded from the outset. Today, all scholars funded by CODESRIA, or simply seeking publication through it, have the benefit of a style guide prepared by the Department of Publications and Dissemination.[1] The fact that funded research is often undertaken by teams of scholars, works in favour of multiple voices, even when the researchers happen to share the

same disciplinary background. In general, the tendency has been and remains to encourage scholars to work together across disciplines, and to ensure representation along the lines of gender, region, language and generation.

Support for scholars

The various programmes are conceived and structured with scholarly excellence and publications of quality in mind. Since training is required to produce scholarship of excellence, CODESRIA has put in place a rigorous training programme through which it attempts to accommodate and cater for the needs and interests of young and upcoming researchers, mid-career scholars and the most senior and experienced members of the African academy. Activities developed and promoted for this purpose range from the award of small grants for thesis-writing in African universities and the organisation of a number of annual, theme-specific 'summer institutes', to the funding of methodological training sessions, the award of advanced research fellowships, a textbook project, the convening of an Annual Social Science Campus, and the launching of an initiative on the Intellectual History of Africa. Thus, although the various training activities undertaken are tailored to serve the needs of specific sections of the social research community, they also constitute an important element in the effort to mobilise all the social research constituencies active on the continent. And the best evidence of that mobilisation can be seen in the diverse menu CODESRIA offers in terms of publications.

For younger scholars, and with publication in mind, the support covers financial grants for fieldwork, provision of bibliographies, textbooks and journals as well as support in understanding research methods. The laureates of the Small Grants Programme benefit from training offered at regional methodology workshops for graduate students. These workshops are designed to equip the younger generation with the latest research tools and materials needed for their research. They also provide an opportunity for the laureates to tap into the experience of established researchers in their fields from within and beyond the continent. The interaction, which this programme offers older and younger scholars, not only promotes a structured system of 'mentoring' but also encourages an inter-generational and multidisciplinary dialogue. Plans are under way to incorporate scholarly writing for publication as a key dimension of future methodology workshops.

In 2002, CODESRIA launched a programme designed to encourage postgraduate research in Africa by offering three prizes annually for the best theses produced within Africa, to be managed by an independent jury

of eminent scholars. The Advanced Research Fellowships Programme is designed to target scholars who are usually in the early post-doctoral stages of their academic careers, although it is not uncommon for senior scholars also to compete for the awards. The fellowship is designed to provide the beneficiaries with an opportunity to initiate new research programmes or to carry existing research concerns further. In this sense, the programme is aimed at creating and sustaining a community of highly skilled intellectuals whose work is, or has the potential of being, at the cutting edge of social research and knowledge production.

Publications programme

Over the years, different outlets have been developed for the scholarship sponsored, and for scholarship not directly sponsored. The bulk of publications in the form of books, monographs and working papers result directly from the research it supports through its Departments of Research and of Training and Grants. Increasingly, it also commissions books on targeted themes for general readership or for specific consumers, with a view to fulfilling its research agenda. In order to stay competitive in the aggressive realm of publishing, CODESRIA simultaneously shops around for relevant scholarship of excellence produced without its support for publication, subject to mutually agreed conditions between the authors and CODESRIA. It remains open to collaboration with various partners and advocacy groups whose vision, mission, and objectives are in accordance with its own. In particular, CODESRIA plans to work closely with various faculties and departments within academic institutions as well as university presses and others to identify theses, dissertations, and other research work for publication, and encourage experts to set up and run book series in particular disciplines and fields of study. As a pan-African organisation with a constituency that draws from different linguistic repertoires, and one which is conscious of the need to encourage greater communication and interchange among African scholars, CODESRIA publishes and encourages publications in Arabic, English, French and Portuguese.

Seven bilingual and multilingual journals are published, with a combined total of well over 1,300 published articles to date, excluding book reviews.[2] In addition, the Council publishes a quarterly bulletin, the *CODESRIA Bulletin/Bulletin du CODESRIA*, that serves as a lively debating forum for new ideas and questions central to the quest for better understanding African experiences. The *Bulletin* is published in Arabic, English, French and, since 2004, Portuguese. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Arab Research Centre based in Cairo, the Council produces

an African Studies Series published in Arabic under the title *Afro-Arab Selections for Social Sciences.* Similarly, in December 2003, the maiden issue of the much-anticipated *Africa Review of Books/Revue Africaine de Livres* was launched. The Review emerged out of a shared concern in the African social research community that considered it expedient to create a forum for a critical presentation of books produced on Africa within and outside the continent. Plans are also at an advanced stage to support the revival of a number of journals as part of CODESRIA's efforts to support the development of African scholarly associations.

Since 1973, CODESRIA has produced over 260 published works. These can be found in the Book Series/Series de Livres; Monographs/ Monographies; the Green Book Series/Livres verts; the State of the Literature/Etat de la littérature; the New Path Series/ Nouvelles pistes; and the Réseau de politiques économiques. The CODESRIA Book Series boasts over 110 books published since its launch in 1981. A host of reference works, including the *Index of African Social Science Periodical Articles*, the *Register of Development Research Projects in Africa*, the *Directory of Development Research and Training Institutes in Africa* and a CD-ROM *on Social Sciences & Aids in Africa* have been produced by the Council.

Within the framework of the Civil Society programme managed in collaboration with the UNDP, a newsletter known as the *Civic Agenda* was produced. CODESRIA's role in providing a platform for research in the social sciences and humanities in Africa is outstanding. For example, between 1982 and 1992, five leading social science journals in the North published only 233 articles by African authors. Within the same period, a single CODESRIA journal, *Africa Development*, published 246 articles, with over 200 of these by African authors. CODESRIA has published authors from every region in Africa; and remains the foremost academic institution in Africa to publish in Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese, the most widely used languages in academic discourse on the continent today.

The Council's publications programme has been very successful not only in projecting the output of African scholars but, equally important, in contributing path-breaking works. This is attested to by the range of award-winning publications, which have been produced under the CODESRIA Book Series. These include: *A Modern Economic History of Africa,* by P.T. Zeleza (Noma Award for Publishing in Africa); *La Natte des Autres*, edited by J. Ki-Zerbo (Prix Rencontre de la Communauté européene); *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises* by P.T. Zeleza (Special Commendation, Noma Award); *Index of African Social Science Peri-*

odical Articles, CODESRIA (Conover Porter Prize); *Sénégal: Trajectoires d'un État (1960-1990),* edited by M.C. Diop (Honourable Mention Prix Rencontre de la Communauté européene); and *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa*, by Claude Ake (Choice Outstanding Academic Title Award).

A vigorous dissemination drive ensures that research produced by Africans and on Africa is accessible in both electronic and non-electronic versions of CODESRIA journals, conference papers and reports. It subsidises the cost of its publications marketed in Africa, and offers free copies to review outlets. CODESRIA undertakes a regular dissemination exercise at which selected titles from its recent publications list are presented to a critical audience of scholars, policy makers, students, journalists and representatives of international organisations. While the various book, monograph, and working document series have served as outlets for CODESRIA sponsored research, conferences, workshops and seminars, the journals have facilitated debate and interchange more generally.

Peer review

If CODESRIA has succeeded in establishing itself as a leading scholarly publisher, this has largely been because of the rigorous peer-review system it has set in place. All articles published in its journals undergo a standard process. All contributions and books published are either products of CODESRIA co-ordinated research with clear scientific and methodological guidance mechanisms, or unsolicited manuscripts from seasoned scholars subjected to rigorous peer review. Members of CODESRIA, scholars on Africa and social scientists around the world have, over the years, contributed in reviewing submissions, and in ensuring the quality and competitiveness of what CODESRIA publishes. Their support has been a 'labour of love', as CODESRIA could never afford to pay reviewers the full worth of their expertise, time and commitment to contributing to the edification of social scientific scholarship on and in Africa.

In line with its policy of undertaking publications in collaboration with or on behalf of relevant professional associations of scholars in various disciplines and fields of the Social Sciences and Humanities, CODESRIA's strategy is to have a peer-reviewer database as broad and representative as possible, to guarantee that every perspective shall be accommodated, and also, to avoid overworking or abusing the generosity of reviewers who are always ready to help out. With this in mind, the secretariat in Dakar encourages scholars to submit their CVs indicating their specialisations and areas of interest, which are constantly updated.

Reviewers are encouraged to be substantive in their comments, since CODESRIA is interested not only in whether or not a paper is suitable for publication, but in the reasons for the decision. This is because CODESRIA sees itself as a special type of scholarly publisher, with a mission not only to harvest the best, but also to assist young, female, and promising researchers to cultivate the art of excellence in writing for scholarly publications. This means that a paper is seldom rejected offhand as not publishable, even when it is clearly substandard. More experienced scholars have an obligation to be patient with their less articulate counterparts, and to assist them in every way to become better writers.

Editorial organisation

CODESRIA depends considerably on editors and editorial boards to realise its publication mission. Its guidelines on the selection of editors and members of editorial advisory boards are quite clear. All Editors of CODESRIA journals are expected to be African scholars based on the continent or in the Diaspora, with good knowledge of CODESRIA and with a proven track record of excellence in competitive scholarship of relevance to the journal in question. Editors are designated by the CODESRIA secretariat in consultation with the Scientific and Executive Committees. In cases where the journal is published for an affiliated professional scholarly association, the CODESRIA secretariat consults with the association as well. Each journal generally has four editors, whose selection is informed by scholarship, language, region and gender. Editors are appointed for a minimum of three years and a maximum of five years.

Editorial Advisory Boards of CODESRIA journals are constituted by the secretariat, in consultation with the relevant Editors of journals. They comprise a majority of reputed African scholars (based on the continent and/or in the Diaspora) and a minority of non-African scholars of Africa with perspectives consistent with CODESRIA's mission and in tune with Africa's quest for better recognition and representation in knowledge production and consumption. When and where excellence exists across the board, care is taken to represent the various disciplines, languages, regions, genders and generations within the CODESRIA constituency. Each CODESRIA journal is limited to a maximum of 20 Editorial Advisory Board members, whose names are duly included in the inside cover and on the relevant page of the CODESRIA website. Editorial Advisory Board members participate actively in CODESRIA's publications activities as peer-reviewers and advisers on themes for journals and book projects. Together with the editors they constitute a rich database of peer-reviewers

for their journals and ensure that the expertise of these reviewers is well tapped. Editorial Advisory Board members serve as peer-reviewers and guest editors of special issues and advise on the overall style and direction and on how to make the journal serve the readership better. At conferences and seminars, they are expected to shop for papers of relevance to their journals, making these available to the editors. In turn, Editorial Advisory Board members are entitled to a free subscription to the journal with which they are involved and have their names listed in alphabetical order on the inside cover. They are also able to view accepted papers, should they wish, before these come out in print. Each Editorial Advisory Board member serves for three years, renewable once.

In order to develop a mutually supportive network of editors and better co-ordinate CODESRIA's various publications, the Secretariat organises an Annual Conference of Editors of CODESRIA Journals, at which each journal is represented by the Editor in Chief, and one other participant selected from among the editors and editorial advisory board members. Each editorial board contributes in the preparation of the agenda for the Annual Conference of Editors by the Department of Publications and Dissemination at CODESRIA. At these conferences and in general, editors are encouraged to: recognise and promote CODESRIA's ideals, mission and objectives in their choice of what is published, without, of course, compromising on the need for quality and competitive scholarship; draw from, as well as enrich, the CODESRIA peer-reviewer database managed and regularly updated by the Department of Publications and Dissemination at the Secretariat; ensure that their journals reflect their CODESRIA identity in terms of logo, style, format, quality and the quest for overall excellence; adopt the CODESRIA style guide, and make this available to potential authors, guest-editors, editorial advisory board members and printers; use their pages where and whenever possible to promote other journals and publications of CODESRIA; enhance dissemination and marketability of their journals by working to ensure quality content and cutting edge scholarship; save costs wherever possible, using the technology at their disposal; actively facilitate the online presence of CODESRIA by providing electronic copies of each issue of their journals to the web manager for processing; and encourage young and female researchers to publish, through a supportive review system.

In addition, the conference serves as a forum for the sharing of experiences, the discussion of new trends in journal publishing, the streamlining of strategies and a discussion on the state of knowledge production and scholarly publishing on the continent. Sometimes, special guests with par-

ticular experiences in certain aspects of publishing are invited to address the editors. For the meeting of 2002, Professor Paul Zeleza was invited to lead the discussion on Electronic publishing, in preparation for the launching of the CODESRIA African Journals Online initiative. For 2003, the special guests included Dr. Jeff Lever, a sociologist who has doubled as a copyeditor for the *African Sociological Review*, and who regularly copyedits for CODESRIA's other publications as well. Dr. Lever shared his experiences of copyediting social scientific work and drew attention to the issues that editors must be sensitive to if they are to ensure the scientific and linguistic qualities of what they publish. Professor Abebe Zegeye of UNISA press was also present to lead the discussion on scholarly publishing in Africa.

Conclusion

CODESRIA has, through its various programmes, consistently promoted African social science research that is rooted in the African experience and speaks to the interests and concerns of the African people. In addition, it has promoted the publication and dissemination of African scholarship, providing opportunities for African scholars to share their research findings and contributing to the development of a culture of scholarly publishing on the continent, which, hopefully, will continue to grow stronger in the future.

Notes

1. 'CODESRIA Guide for Authors', p. 19.
2. *Africa Development / Afrique et développement; Africa Media Review/Revue Africaine Des Medias, African Sociological Review / Revue africaine de sociologie; African Journal of International Affairs/ Revue africaine des relations internationales; Afrika Zamani: A Journal of African History; Identity, Culture and Politics: an Afro-Asian Dialogue; Journal of Higher Education in Africa / Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique*.

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Politics of Indexation: Beyond the Fingering & Figuring of Knowledge

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Abstract

The present essay traces the history of indexation, and discusses the challenge for indexing Africa in the 21st century. It then examines the possibilities and promises of indexing newer sources of knowledge drawing from the experiences of Afro-Asian relations through the journal, *Identity, Culture and Politics: An Afro-Asian Dialogue*.

Key terms: Politics of indexation, indexation, criminality and racism, science of indexing, googlization of knowledge, deterritorialization, cyberindexing

Résumé

L'étude fait l'historique de l'indexation et traite du défi que pose l'indexation africaine au 21e siècle. Elle passe ensuite en revue les possibilités et espoirs d'indexation des nouvelles sources de connaissance en s'inspirant de l'expérience des relations afro-asiatiques par le biais de la revue *Identité, culture et politique: un dialogue afro-asiatique*.

Mots clés : Politique d'indexation, indexation, criminalité et racisme, technique de l'indexation, googlisation des connaissances, déterritorialisation, cyber indexation

Introduction

An international traveller now comes across a familiar request at all American airports: 'Could you please press here your right index finger? Yes, and now the left one?' Evidently, this is not a request coming from

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a jailor to the condemned, although arguments could be made towards thinking or even justifying precisely that. The index finger has certainly attained prominence in the aftermath of 9/11 and individuals, particularly in the case of the United States, could now be barred or prohibited from entering the country on the basis of the profile not of the person (as it is found in the passport) but of the index finger. The practice otherwise signalled the creative indexation of the human flesh or should we say, the Orwellian of the body!

The relationship between indexation and prohibition or even criminality is an old one. There are two, albeit somewhat similar, facets to this. The first one relates to the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* or the 'Index of Forbidden Books' by the Roman Catholic Church. The practice of banning and burning books has been carried out in different cultures and civilizations probably from the time books first began to be published for public consumption. In the Christian world the first burning of books takes place with the new converts of St. Paul, who were eager to burn all superstitious books. In fact, in 496, following the decree of Pope Gelasius I, a list in the form of an index was made for all recommended and banned books. But it was only in 1559 that the Sacred Congregation of the Roman Inquisition published the first catalogue of forbidden books with the word 'index' in its title. The periodic publication of such an index was finally discontinued in 1966.

No less telling has been the modern birth and practice of indexing fingerprints. There is a precise colonial legacy to this. One year after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 William James Herschel was made the Assistant Joint Magistrate and Collector of a district near Calcutta in Bengal. His responsibility stretched from collecting the district's tax to building roads. Faced with the hatred and non-cooperation of the natives Herschel found that the former, including the contractors, got into the habit of breaking their contracts, even denying their own signatures. To ensure that Raj Konai, a contractor, abide by his agreement to deliver materials for road-building Herschel tried 'an experiment by taking the stamp of his hand…to frighten Konai out of all thought of repudiating his signature.'[1] The printing of Konai's hand made Herschel the first in British history to regularly use fingerprints officially.[2]

Aided no less by the innovation in the techniques in France and elsewhere in Europe, fingerprints soon began to be used for the purpose of indexing criminals and no less interestingly, for racial and hereditary purpose. In 1891 Sir Francis Galton, the English explorer, anthropologist, and eugenicist, frankly stated:

> In the present memoir I shall explain the way in which fingerprints may be indexed and referred to after the fashion of a dictionary, and on the same general principle as that devised by A. Bertillon with respect to anthropometric measures, whose ingenious method is now in regular use on a very large scale in the criminal administration of France and elsewhere.
>
> It must not, however, be supposed that the use of indexing finger marks is limited to the above purpose, the purpose of doing so being equally needed for racial and hereditary inquiries.[3]

Indexing, therefore, from its birth and early practices began to be associated with prohibition, criminality and racism. There is otherwise a structural limitation to its inclusiveness, for in trying to 'index' one must select, hierarchize and empower one over the other. The science of indexing has only made the method more hegemonic and few now tend to realize and accept the divisiveness if not the political quest that is so central to indexation.

The Science of Indexing

In an interview with Barbara Vega in 2001 Lori Lathrop, the former President of the *American Society of Indexers* and a Senior Member of the *Society for Technical Communication*, systematically and in some details identified the techniques of indexing.[4] Four or five key features could easily be identified. Firstly, and no less surprisingly, the selection criteria. 'How do I select index entries?' Lathrop has no problem in responding to this query:

> Fortunately, I have a simple answer: Create index entries that meet the 'Happy to be here!' criteria. In other words, create entries that point to information that either tells readers how to do something or provides important details…. Your index entries should be both specific and concise. As you gain more experience in indexing, you will find it easier to create entries that balance being specific with being concise.

'Happy to be here!' criteria? What word would not crave for it? But there is also the problem of not raising the flag and being instantly indexed. In fact, this could make many believe in the 'unhappiness' of the word if not in the marginalization and alienation of the subject. Lathrop does have an answer to this, to which we will return shortly.

Secondly, quality. Indexing must be 'accurate and complete, free from errors, and consistent in style and terminology.' But who is going to ensure this? Lathrop comes up with a quick answer: The writer should take 'just a little more time to edit the index before submitting it for production.' She then reiterates the suggestion made by one of her clients: 'the writers

should plan to spend as much time creating an index as they would spend developing a major chapter.' But a quick answer, although honest, is often besoiled with contradictions. If the task of indexing falls on the writer, what would Lathrop or even the professional indexers do? Lathrop does have an answer to this but let me save it for the moment.

Thirdly, quantity. There are some precise quantifiable measurements pertaining to indexing. According to Lathrop:

> A good rule of thumb is that you should have one double-column page of index for every twenty pages of text. That equates to approximately 5% of the text. Most writers can index 10-12 pages per hour. Of course, they may be able to index more pages if the text is not dense with indexable terms and concepts, and they will index fewer pages per hour if the text is quite dense. That estimate does not include editing time, which should take at least 25% as much time as the indexing process takes.

This certainly sounds more 'scientistic' than science, paralleling the figuring of knowledge that has come to inform and define some of the disciplines in post-positivist social sciences now. And as with any figuring of knowledge there is the instant cropping up of professionals and experts, solidly skilful not in the creative reproduction of concepts or even knowledge but in the art of repetitive knowledge ingeniously referred to as the science of quantification. In the back of the mind there is no doubt the assumption of a linear relationship between the writer and the reader, with the former directing and determining the latter. And this brings us to the most critical feature.

Finally, the satisfaction of the customer. Lathrop now comes up wholly dressed as a salesperson:

> Good indexers have a 'crystal ball' in their heads that helps them apply audience analysis skills to their indexes, creating entries that end users are likely to use in searching for information. You need to know how novices, experienced users, and everyone in between will look for information – and provide appropriate entries for them.
>
> Novice users will look for main entries that point them to broad terms and concepts, and your subentries will provide them with 'topic analysis' that helps them understand the finer points. More experienced users will look for main headings that take them directly to those finer points. Therefore, when you 'double post' subentries as main headings, you are making your index usable for advanced users….
>
> The moral of the story is simple: A well-written, comprehensive index increases customer satisfaction and reduces costly product support time because it makes your products easier to learn and use.

Apart from pre-judging or determining what novice or advanced users would be looking for, Lathrop transforms indexing, and even knowledge, into a political economy with indexing becoming merely a part and parcel of 'audience analysis skills' and critically, rational cost-analysis. Indexing otherwise becomes a commodity, the saleability of which is crucial in giving birth to the book and the author! More importantly, as a commodity, could indexing remain devoid of social and political compulsions? Gramsci, if I am to recollect correctly, once noted that 'Everything is political, even philosophy or philosophies. And the only philosophy is history in action, that is, life itself.'[5] There is no reason for the science or rather the political economy of indexing (if we were to agree with Lathrop) to be any different. I will have more to say about this shortly.

Lathrop makes two other assertions that are equally noteworthy. The first one relates to the items that need not be indexed. Documentation fewer than 'twenty pages' or documentation with only 'lists or tables and very little text' may be omitted. Secondly, when choosing between online and printed documentation, the former ought to be given preference, indeed, for no other reason than speed, impatience and marketability. As Lathrop explains with some excitement:

> Something happens to most people when they get online. It's similar to what happens to me when I get behind the wheel of my little Mazda Miata convertible: I want to get there now, and I don't want anything to get in my way! Similarly, most people become more impatient when they are online. They want instant gratification, and they become impatient if they do not get it.
>
> Readers want index entries that take them directly to the information they need in just split seconds so they can get back to work. They do not want to go on a 'fishing expedition', which is what they are forced to do if all they have is full text search that yields a gazillion irrelevant hits, does not provide them with any real 'topic analysis' and, most importantly, cannot distinguish between significant information and passing references.

But then, once we are 'online', are we not entering into the hegemonic/hierarchical domain of patented knowledge? Does indexing then become a function of the developed economies, while the less developed economies not unlike the classical relationship of dependence must continue to remain at the mercy of the former? What about the question of accessibility? Or, for that matter, who ensures the quality of indexing over the quantity of indexing?

The Googlization of Knowledge

Few can deny the contribution of www.google.com in the birth of virtual indexing or even virtual library. In many respect it has become the starting point of information and knowledge not only for the novice but also for the serious researchers. But then with constant entries each day with no barrier to space the google has suffered from what can be best referred to as a knowledge boom. To provide one instance, a search on 'Terrorism' produced over 21 million entries on 15 January 2005 at 13.30 hours. Bringing the search to 'Terrorism South Asia' and 'Terrorism Africa' proved no different either, over 2.5 million and 3.6 million entries respectively. And the number in each of these subjects is rising at an astronomic speed every day. While the sea of information may certainly delight the browser, making them all useful however is out of the question. The collection of information merely becomes a theoretical abstract with limited practical significance. Such collection simply joins, as John Ralston Saul once suggested albeit in a different context, the rank of the ludicrousness of numbers, which after a point becomes impractical and meaningless.[6] But there is more to the googlization of knowledge.

Lest one be charged for being a novice in browsing, particularly with respect to the above outcome, an attempt was made to be more specific in the use of cyberindexing. A search was carried out on the website www.educationindex.com to get some specific information on education related to politics. The website instantly showed a topic-by-topic break-down of 56 subjects from 'Agriculture' to 'Women's Studies' with the message 'the best sites on the World Wide Web.' Clicking on the subject 'Political Science' revealed a list of further websites, altogether 82, this time with the message 'Government and Political Science Resources.' But then, more than 45 of the total 82 websites were directly related to the United States, beginning with the 'American Planning Association' and ending interestingly with the 'Welcome to the White House' website. The education/political science index also included the 'CIA', 'DefenseLINK', the 'Department of the State', and the 'FBI' with the 'Most Wanted List'!

Two outcomes are certain from the googlization of knowledge. Firstly, the parcellization of knowledge, incidentally for reasons that are partly structural and partly deliberate. The lack of monographic treatment to any of the issues covered by cyberindexing is bound to make a browser half-read if not ill read. Indeed, knowledge in the form of cryptic notes is likely to reproduce cryptic scholars with a methodological biased towards naïve positivism. This could only limit, and even cancel, the healthy debate between and amongst the various methodological and theoretical discourses.

The deliberate part is no less critical either. Thoroughly schooled and disciplined in locational (read here Western) politics there is a well-founded belief in the authenticity of Western or more specifically American sources of knowledge and conversely a general distrust of non-Western sources of knowledge. Mainstream cyberindexing cannot help but reproduce the pride and prejudices of Western hegemonic powers.

Secondly, and this is largely the result of the first, knowledge dissemination transforming into knowledge discrimination. The location of the websites and the persons or the institutes feeding them does make a difference to the design, substance and the final product of cyberindexing. In this context, there is a clear rupture when it comes to the globalization of technology with the developed economies having the resources (and this in real financial terms) to outwit and de-educate the rest of the relatively have-nots of the world. Accessibility to libraries, including major publication houses and journals, becomes conditional on the availability of funds, even credit cards. Moreover, a uniformed charging of fees, coupled with currency regulations, privileges the members of developed economies compared to those located in less developed economies. The googlization of knowledge has otherwise resulted in a cyberclass that readily prides on its privilege of accessibility to knowledge. The limitations, if not the envy, of the have-nots are understandable. The challenge for indexing in the twenty-first century therefore is both virtual and real.

Indexing 'Afro-Asia' in the Age of Deterritorialization

This mainly refers to the possibilities of indexing newer sources of knowledge arising from the journal, *Identity, Culture and Politics: An Afro-Asian Dialogue* (from hence ICP), published jointly by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Dakar, and the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo. The journal ICP in terms of its conception, production and dissemination defies the classical or geopolitical understanding of territoriality. Instead, it can claim itself to be a product of deterritorialization or what is more commonly referred to as globalization. Deterritorialization captures better the essence of the matter for, as Deleuze and Guattari maintains,[7] there is newer forms of territoriality or reterritorialization with the advent of deterritorialization, and that is precisely what is taking place with the publication of ICP as part of a joint collaboration between the members and institutes of two continents. This is markedly different from the Afro-Asian collaboration of earlier eras. Let me explain.

The most notable collaboration between Asia and Africa was the state-sponsored 'Afro-Asian solidarity', with key figures like Gamal Abdel Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah, Jawaharlal Nehru and Bung Sukarno collectively building and policing the forum to distance themselves and there respective states and regions from the menace of Cold War confrontations. The solidarity, more pronounced following the Bandung Conference of 1955, was mainly premised on the rivalry of the Superpowers albeit with an element of anti-Americanism in it. In many ways the solidarity also ended up being dependent on the continuation of the Cold War, and therefore with the end of the Cold War it practically lost its charm. Apart from a few non-state interactions, and that again largely restricted to government-sponsored academic and cultural exchanges, the solidarity remained wholly committed to the international policymaking of the state. Even the non-governmental initiative under the banner of Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization, founded in 1955, remained state-centric with ideological leanings interestingly towards the Soviet Union and communist China!8 In fact, in many respect it proved detrimental to the growth and nurturing of the age-old spirit of Afro-Asianism, which often found its creative expressions not in governmental initiatives but in the works of political and literary personalities like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Frantz Fanon, Eqbal Ahmad, Leopold Senghor, Samir Amin, Edward Said and Wole Soyinka. When ICP was conceptualised with the moral support of the martyr Neelan Tiruchelvan, the former Director of ICES, the idea was largely to revive the age-old spirit of Afro-Asianism, something that matched with the core objectives of both CODESRIA and ICES.

However, in the age of deterritorialization the spirit of Afro-Asianism has come to hold newer (and I dare say, following Deleuze and Guattari, reterritorialized) meanings. One critical aspect of this has been to *decenter* the earlier reference points of state and Western discourses and initiate wholly non-state, non-Western, deterritorialized discourse. The ICP journal, in fact, comes up with a very conscious sub-title called 'Afro-Asian Dialogue'. There are three sets of meanings to this. Firstly, Africa and Asia are treated in a non-hierarchized manner. Intellectual discourses emerging from this is immense since structures of domination do not impinge upon the relationship and distort the nature of the discourse beforehand. Secondly, the dialogue is as much external as it is within. This is critical for both Asia and Africa since both have immensely been informed and shaped, more particularly because of the colonial legacy, by the Western modernist discourse. The attempt to fall back on the indigenous is

genuine, indispensable and urgent. Indeed, nurturing the indigenous on a continental basis and having them exchanged and discoursed creates the possibility of overcoming the tyrannical power of modernity, including some of the demonic consequences of it.[9] And thirdly, as part of the deterritorialized discourse, the dialogue cancels the notion of singularity. Instead, it is both multilayered and multiversed, in fact, it can very well be referred to as a *multilogue* to remove the duality suggested by the prefix 'di' in the word 'dialogue'. A spontaneous and passionate nurturing of this would not only challenge the conformity that has so far made little sense to the social realities in both the continents but also mainstream pluralities and multiplicities, the very essence of the age-old spirit of Afro-Asianism.

Conclusion: A Plea for an Alternative Indexation

The following two processes must be overcome for one to start even contemplating an alternative indexation. Firstly, the recognition sought from the Western indexing houses for the dissemination of books and journals of Asia and Africa must be reoriented. In fact, the latter ought to continue publishing qualitative materials so that the former keeps looking for them. A modest beginning in this respect ought to be for the scholars and researchers of Afro-Asia (and this evidently in deterritorialized sense) desist the temptation of publishing singularly in the West. There have indeed been instances where books and articles dealing with Asia and Africa have remained unknown within the respective continents for lack of accessibility as well as high cost. This kills the very purpose for which they have been written unless the goal was to enrich the author's curriculum vitae and ensure a job in the West! It may be worthwhile to point out that Gandhi had his *Hind Swaraj* first published in Gujarat and that again by a pretty unknown publisher, but the book did not fail to ignite the imagination of millions of people around the world.

Secondly, like the case of publishing books, there has been a constant 'journal drain' (that is, the good ones) from the non-West to the West. One good example would be the journal, *Alternatives*, which had its birth at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, but is now published in the West, and more ironically now caters mainly to the scholars and researchers of Western academic institutions than of India or the non-West. In fact, the latter is now re-taught the wisdom of 'alternatives', paralleling very much the modernity that the scholars of CSDS wanted to overcome. Unless both these processes are effectively managed no amount of indexation would do justice to Afro-Asian scholarship.

The alternative indexation could be made more precise. This could be packaged in terms of four key features. Firstly, the non-hierarchical element is a critical prerequisite. This ought to be understood not only with respect to themes but also with respect to the authorship. In the traditional indexation when it comes to themes there is a two-pronged emphasis on the universals and empowered individuals. If the former consists of state power, rationality, national security, modernity, globalization and the like, the latter limits its reach mainly to the national and governmental elites. In the case of authorship, the hierarchy is more pronounced, often related to the attention given by the visual and print media. The introduction of non-hierarchy in the indexation is not to suggest doing away with themes and authorship. On the contrary, to be more comprehensive, aggressive, even radical, in the inclusion of themes and authorship.

Secondly, the alternative indexation must overcome the rigidity of disciplinary boundaries. Apart from making the indexation multi-disciplinary, there has to be more creative formulation of the latter so that the multiplicities and pluralities of life and living get an instant voice and a proper representation. On a technical note, much of this can be done by way of adding 'abstract' of the text to the indexing.

Thirdly, accessibility. This should be understood in the broadest possible terms, from the contents to the dissemination of the text. We have already identified some of the problems related to accessibility, many of which could be handled by prioritising accessibility and making funds available for it. But there is a need for a longer-term investment on this. Unless ownership of the books and journals are assured by housing them in an affordable location there will always be a case of inaccessibility or a rising cost connected to it. Public and private institutes, including Universities, of different countries could join resources to form regional libraries or documentation centres, with accessibility guaranteed to the members of those countries. Similarly, on matters related to Asia and Africa, a network of collaboration could be developed amongst academic and research institutes of these two continents under the rubric of 'Afro-Asian University' and scholarly resources could be housed accordingly. Any indexation on topics related to Africa or Afro-Asia would have the option of being promised by accessibility.

Finally, the question of intent. Apart from the noble intellectual exercise, the spirit of Africanism as embodied in the foundation of CODESRIA or the spirit of Afro-Asianism as nurtured by the ICP journal ought to come alive in the indexation. This would make the latter stand apart from

the mainstream indexation with the objective of putting knowledge into a just, almost counter-hegemonic, cause.

Notes

1. Cited in Colin Beavan, *Fingerprints: Murder and the Race to Uncover the Science of Identity* (London: Fourth Estate, 2002), p.40.
2. The Chinese and Japanese were the first to make use of fingerprints as signatures, and that again as early as 600 A.D. Interestingly, many critics claimed that Herschel probably got the idea from the practices in Calcutta's Chinatown, but Herschel always maintained that 'the fingerprint conception had come in a sudden flash of his own inspiration.' See, Colin Beavan, Ibid., pp.42-43.
3. Francis Galton, 'Method of Indexing Finger Marks', *Nature*, June 11, 1891.
4. For all reference to Lori Lathrop, see, *Inkspot*, 2001. See also, http://www.barbaravega.com/.
5. See, Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).
6. John Ralston Saul, *Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 142.
7. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum [1972] 2004).
8. There seems to be a renewed interest in the Bandung Conference, now that it has reached 50 years. In fact, in May 2005 there is an international conference in Palo Alto, California on 'Bandung and Beyond: Rethinking Afro-Asian Connections during the Twentieth Century.' Ironically, this is being done in a location faraway from both the continents! However, there have been other initiatives on the above theme organized mainly by the members of Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization. See, Daily News, Colombo, 4 September 2002. See also, Hasan Mujtaba, 'Afro-Asia in Pakistan: Historic, political and intellectual linkages between Africa & Pakistan', *Samar*, Volume 13, Winter/Spring 2000, and Laura Bier, 'Our Sisters in Struggle: Non-Alignment, Afro-Asian Solidarity and National Identity in the Egyptian Women's Press: 1952-1967', *Working Paper # 4*, International Centre for Advanced Studies, New York University, April 2002.
9. For a detailed exposition of this theme, see Imtiaz Ahmed, 'Futures Beyond Nationalism', *Futures: the journal of policy, planning and futures studies*, Elsevier Science, Exeter, UK, Volume 37, Number 9, November 2005.

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Indexing for Communication Journals in Africa: The global knowledge economy and the politics of knowledge distribution

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Abstract

Globalization, the attempt by organizations to expand beyond their domestic boundaries in a manner that assures social and cultural integration, is shaping and reshaping how knowledge is constructed, produced, and distributed in the international arena. Informatization, the utilization of advancements in communication and information technologies, while altering individual lifestyles and the cultural landscape of many societies, has also hastened the pace of globalization. How to become a part of this evolving global knowledge economy has been the focus of discourse among scholars involved in the knowledge industry in different global regions. This essay explores attempts by African scholars to integrate 'African knowledge' into the evolving global knowledge economy. Through the work of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, this essay also examines the politics, challenges and promises of 'internationalizing' knowledge.

Key terms

Indexation, peer review process, Com Abstracts, Psyclit, Sociological Abstracts, knowledge economy, knowledge production, knowledge distribution

Résumé

Globalisation, la tentative par des organismes d'augmenter au delà de leurs frontières domestiques en quelque sorte qui assure social et l'intégration culturelle est formante et remodelante comment la connaissance est construite, produit, et distribué dans l'arène internationale. L'informatisation, l'utilisation des avancements en technologies de communication et d'information, tout en changeant différents styles de vie et le paysage culturel de beaucoup de sociétés, a également accéléré le pas de la globalisation. Comment devenir une partie de

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cette économie globale de évolution de la connaissance a été le centre du discours parmi des disciples impliqués dans l'industrie de la connaissance dans différentes régions globales. Cet essai explore des tentatives par les disciples africains d'intégrer la 'connaissance africaine' dans l'économie globale de évolution de la connaissance. Par le travail du Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique, cet essai examine également la politique, les défis et les promesses connaissance de internationalisation de 'de la'.

Mots clés : Indexation, évaluation scientifique, *Com Abstracts*, *Psyclit, Sociological Abstracts*, économie de la connaissance, production de connaissances, partage des connaissances

Introduction

There is a growing discourse in Africa regarding how best to position African scholars as strategic partners and competitors in knowledge production and distribution. Across the globe, similar discussions are taking place in different regions (Santos 2003). Previous essays in this volume provide several reasons for this growing discourse—For example, the need 'to become active players in the global flow of information and scholarship, controlling our own means of production and distribution, or at the minimum, having a strong voice in the process' (Le Roux and Nwosu 2006). Other reasons are linked to the publicity, trustworthiness and accessibility of the scholarship in question, and the increasing utilization of the global reach of one's scholarship in making determination about tenure, research grants, promotion, and so forth in a number of institutions of higher education.

How knowledge is constructed, packaged, and distributed today is being shaped and reshaped by two forces: first, by globalization and second, by advances in information and communication technology. As Masuda (1981) has noted, in the information society, knowledge or the manner it is produced and distributed will be the driving force of society rather than industrial technologies (p. 29). It is true that we face an era where information and communication technologies have enhanced the interconnectedness of the world; thus minimizing social and cultural barriers. What is of great significance to the issues explored in this essay is the possibility of distributing/sharing 'African knowledge' far and wide in the context of globalization and information and communication technologies. We want to look at this possibility as made feasible by the advances in these two areas. I recognize that globalization has been defined in various ways. For the most part, scholars use the term to refer to 'the interconnectedness of political entities, economic relationships, or even computer networks' (Kluver 2006). From an economic standpoint, others

see it as 'the attempt by organizations to expand beyond their domestic boundaries' (Olaniran 2003). For purposes of this essay, I will draw from these definitions, but more important, I will use the term to also refer to ways in which globalization is seen as a value, that is, the extent to which globalization seeks cultural and social integration and assures that multiple voices (not just the dominant voices) are also heard in the evolving discourse about the global knowledge economy (Kluver 2006).

In his fascinating book, Information Society as Post-Industrial Society, Masuda (1981) argues that advancements in information technologies will profoundly hasten the pace of globalization, and radically alter the way in which cultures and societies have lived their lives and conducted their own affairs. Wang (1994) has employed the term 'Informatization' to refer to the phenomenon whereby the utilization of advancements in communication and information technologies, while altering individual lifestyles and the cultural landscape of many societies, has also hastened the pace of globalization. Some of the radical changes that have taken place in most societies in such areas as culture, politics, economy, and so on in the last twenty years, and the 'unprecedented growth in the speed, quantity, and popularity of information production and distribution' (Wang 1994) are a consequence of the profound effect of information technologies on our lives. We have seen in the last twenty years a massive transformation in the nature of social relations and human interactions, brought about, in part, by advances in information and communication technologies. Africa has not been immune to this transformation.

However, of concern to the knowledge industry in Africa is how best to access these new technologies in pursuit of the production and distribution of 'African knowledge,' and in a way that sees globalization as a value that ensures the inclusion of multiple voices. There is general agreement among knowledge industry scholars in Africa that control or access to technology in the context of the production and the distribution infrastructure will largely permit Africans to shape the nature of the discourse about them in the new global economy. How this might happen was the focus of a two-day annual meeting of journal editors of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). The meeting, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2004, focused attention on the utilization of the global system of indexation as a strategy for moving 'African knowledge' beyond the boundaries of Africa.

Indexation, the knowledge economy and globalization

Indexation is a method of organizing knowledge and classifying information in a manner that permits greater access, visibility, marketability and readership, as well as global/international recognition. This process has become even more enhanced with advances in information and communication technologies. A journal becomes international when it is indexed in international academic reference databases (Rui Santos 2003; *e-JPH,* Volume 1, Number 2). In this sense, a journal published in Nigeria may be international or global if it is indexed, while one published in the United States may not be, if it is not indexed.

Indexation assures that a journal has passed the test of international scholarly scrutiny consistent with a specific referencing system's academic and linguistic traditions, as well as disciplinary boundaries and coverage. Of course, those who own, manage, and maintain the referencing system set the parameters for such scrutiny. Thus when a journal is referenced or indexed in data bases such as Com Abstracts (Communication), Psyclit (Psychology), Econlit (Economics), MLA International Bibliography (Linguistics and Literature), ERIC (Education Sciences), International Index to Music Periodicals, to name a few, such journal is said to have met rigorous standards and criteria.

There are several advantages to journal indexation. First, indexation encourages high quality manuscript submissions to the journal from a wide range of scholars and researchers around the globe. Second, some academic institutions rely upon indexation when decisions are made with respect to receiving research subsidies or with respect to retention, tenure and promotion (RTP). A number of universities in Africa now rely on this in the RTP process. In South Africa, for example, publishing in a journal that is indexed assures that the researcher receives subsidy for his/her work from government. Third, indexation increases journal credibility, visibility and accessibility among a community of scholars, researchers, and policy makers. Fourth, through indexation, international interest and journal marketability/sales are enhanced, especially with respect to institutional subscriptions. To what extent has the knowledge industry participated in this international indexation process in order to expand the boundaries of African scholarship beyond the continent?

African scholarship and control

African participation in the international indexation system can be described as fragmentary and uncoordinated because there has not been any focused attempt to internationalize/globalize 'African knowledge'. There are many

reasons for this. Among them are these: centuries of European influence in Africa which has left the ownership of the knowledge production and distribution industry in Africa largely in the hands of outsiders; the common focus on local production which has largely ignored marketing and distribution to an international audience; funding challenges at local levels which have affected the growth of the production and distribution sectors; lack of local audience patronage for the production/publishing industry; and the politics of knowledge production and distribution in which scholarship that supports vested interests gets to see the light of the day (Nyamnjoh 2004). Let us address briefly each of these points.

First, for nearly fifty years since most countries in Africa became independent from colonial rule, the production and distribution sectors of knowledge about Africa, in Africa, by African scholars, have remained largely foreign in the hands of European and American publishing companies or their affiliates Both Nyamnjoh (2004), and Zegeye (2005) have articulated the negative consequences of this kind of ownership on the knowledge production industry in Africa. Zegeye, for example, has called for the democratization of the knowledge production space to permit more access for local publishers. In an era of globalization, how we begin to democratize the space for knowledge production as well as distribution about Africa in ways that permit an African presence/voice is an essential project. Here, two central questions must be addressed: how can Africa produce and market its own scholarship? How can African scholars begin to democratize the knowledge production and distribution space in ways that catapult African scholarship in the international arena? These questions were raised at the Nairobi meeting. I will return to these questions later.

Second, while discourses about African scholarship have generally focused on the local production of knowledge and the forces that enhance or impede such efforts, not much has been written about the dissemination or distribution of such knowledge beyond the boundaries of Africa. While local publishing does exist in many parts of the continent, Western publishers who are largely in control of the production infrastructure, generally dominate the publishing industry in Africa. They also dominate the distribution industry.

A third major and related factor is funding. In some instances where there is local production, the support for such efforts has come from external donor agencies and governments. The Heinemann African Writers Series (AWS), a major publishing series in African Literature for many years, ended its operations in 2003 due to 'persistent financial losses occasioned

by the fact that only an elite few in Africa read in English …and amongst those who do, few who can afford to buy a book want to read African authors' (Nyamnjoh 2004:1).

Related to this is the lack of local support for the local production industry. While works form local production outfits such as AWS, 'delighted many people…in Africa and beyond' (Achebe 2000: 51), many of these works failed to be supported by the reading audience in Africa. Nyamjoh has argued that the lack of patronage of African authors by African readers has been a major challenge to the local production industry in Africa. Ironically, this lack of patronage may be a good reason for exploring external audiences beyond the boundaries of Africa, and for integrating the knowledge industry into the global system.

Finally, there is the politics of production and distribution which has become a huge impediment to the knowledge industry in Africa. In this instance, for example, vested .interests of national and foreign governments as well as multilateral institutions who seek to control and manage the citizens' right to know and what they should know become important stakeholders in the process. In his writing about similar challenges in the United States, Ali Mazrui (1990) notes that 'reputable publishers turn down manuscripts, edit out ideas, or surgically remove chapters likely to offend powerful groups in the nation'. The decision regarding what to turn down, edit, or remove is sometimes guided by profit motive. Those whose ideas help to generate profit are published regardless of the consequences. Authors whose ideas reflect the preferred and prevailing societal ideology also get published.

Thus, despite local efforts, the infrastructure capacity for knowledge production and knowledge distribution in Africa remains essentially foreign, a point fully recognized and discussed at the Nairobi meeting.

Africa and the global knowledge economy

In his essay titled 'Knowledge production and publishing in Africa', Abebe Zegeye (2005) writes that knowledge production in Africa 'has become an institution or a conglomeration of institutions with distinct sites at universities, in civil organizations, commissioned research and education systems'. In a sense, the knowledge production industry has become what Zegeye (2005) refers to as the "purveyors of the knowledge economy'. A knowledge economy 'is one in which the generation and exploitation of knowledge play the predominant part in the creation of wealth' (United Kingdom Department of Trade and Industry 1998). In a previous essay, I noted that the knowledge economy has four component parts: It is fast. It

is global. It is technology-driven. It is networked. A knowledge economy is fast because it involves expediting the process for getting products to the intended market. It is global because companies and individuals now have greater access to diverse and geographically dispersed consumer audiences worldwide. We have entered the era of global connectivity—when people are not physically mobile, yet they are connected through technology. The knowledge economy is also technology-intensive because it involves the utilization of an increasingly complex set of technical tools to innovate ideas, goods and services. Finally, a knowledge economy is also networked because it makes the interconnectedness of multiple processes and parties necessary in order to bring products, goods and services to the market (Nwosu 2005:61-66). If the knowledge industry in Africa is to become a part of the evolving global knowledge economy, then scholarship produced in Africa, about Africa(ns), by Africa scholars must also become widely distributed and accessible to international audiences. Such distribution would require participation in a global system of indexation that assures consistency, regularity, and usefulness. As Rui Santos note, internationalization is about the boundaries of writing, reading and usefulness (Santo 2004:1).

In this sense, several questions must be posed: Where is 'African knowledge' in this matrix of internationalization/globalization? What can scholars do to ensure that the knowledge industry in Africa becomes a part of the evolving global knowledge economy and becomes widely distributed and accessible to international audiences? This was the focus of the Nairobi meeting.

The Nairobi meeting and CODESRIA

In the previous sections, I argued that Africa's participation in the internationalization matrix has been, at best, fragmentary and uncoordinated, because there has not been any focused attempt to internationalize African scholarship. The Nairobi meeting sponsored by CODESRIA was specifically designed to pursue this effort, and to begin a focused process of ensuring the wider distribution and international recognition of African scholarship, especially journals produced in Africa, about Africa, by Africans, beginning the works of CODESRIA.

The choice of CODESRIA as the leader in internationalizing African knowledge is fairly obvious. For more than thirty years now, the organization has distinguished itself as the top non-governmental centre of social knowledge production about Africa and Africans on the continent. Today CODESRIA boasts of 7 print journals, 5 online journals, nearly 200 hun-

dred books and monographs, and other special publications whose impact remain unquantifiable in terms of the intellectual advancement of the continent. More than any other publishing and scholarly agency in Africa, its publications, which embrace the continent's diversity, are produced in the four main working languages in Africa: English, French, Portuguese, and Arabic. Its other advantage is that it is an independent Pan-African research organization, and does not report to any government, although much of its funding comes from international donor agencies such as the Swedish International Development Corporation Agency, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, United Nations Development Programme, and the Carnegie Corporation, among others.

How does CODESRIA begin this task of internationalizing African scholarship? At the Nairobi meeting, CODESRIA journal editors had robust discussions about the promises and challenges of internationalization, and agreed that CODESRIA should pursue a two-pronged strategy as follows:

1. Develop an online annotated bibliographic tool of all published work about Africa and its peoples, beginning first with all of CODESRIA's publications. Already work has begun on the CODESRIA's Indexation Project, an international indexation system dedicated to scholarship on and about Africa. This continent-based system would have clear, rigorous standards, indexation criteria, including relevancy, regularity, peer-review, quality, style, institutional affiliation, accessibility, and consistency.
2. Begin the process for indexation of all of CODESRIA's journals in major international indexation systems such as Social Science Index, PsychLit, Social Science Index, among others. The choice of indexation system for each of CODESRIA's journals should be based on disciplinary relevance.

Thus far, journal editors have started the process by taking the following steps: begun a process of retrieivng copies of the criteria system for indexation in major international journals to the extent that they are relevant to journals published by CODESRIA's. Editors are using these criteria sets to develop plans for the indexation of specific journals. Contacts are also being initiated with specific indexing organizations as is relevant for each of CODESRIA's journals.

I will now review efforts being instituted by CODESRIA to advance the indexation of its premier communication journal: *Africa Media Review*

Africa Media Review (AMR)

As the leading communication journal in Africa, *AMR* is dedicated to the publication of original research as well as manuscripts on best practices, which advance communication policy, scholarship and application in the continent. As a collaborative publication of CODESRIA and the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE), AMR seeks to 'raise awareness and understanding about the interconnections between media, communication and social processes in Africa, and how these shape and are affected by policies and practices at global, regional and local levels'. (AMR, Volume 12, Number 1, pp. iii-iv).

AMR is the only continent-wide journal in communication, and is published twice a year and covers articles in English and French. Since the inception of AMR in 1986, publishing in the journal is generally regarded by peers throughout Africa as one of the best single measures of scholarly productivity. Scholars' reputation and career opportunities are perceived to be enhanced through publication in AMR.

By 2000, the journal, which had been published by ACCE with international donor support, had seized publication. At the 2003 biennial meeting of ACCE held in Abuja, Nigeria, the leadership of the organization negotiated with Codesria to take over the publication of the journal. After nearly four years in hiatus, AMR resumed publication in spring 2004, with a reorganized editorial structure (consisting of three editors) and an international editorial advisory board made of 20 leading scholars from across the globe. A number of changes are now being instituted to assure indexation in several international indexation systems. These changes include consistency in editorial style, regularity and timeliness in production, inclusion of abstracts and key terms, absence of major gaps with publication issues, affiliation of journal with reputable institutions; and identifiable website for the journal ownership institution, among others. Several of these criteria are already in place. With its long history of publishing and a strong peer review mechanism, AMR has a high international indexing potential. The current efforts at indexing the journal, when completed, will efforts move the journal as Africa's leading communication journal toward greater visibility and utilization by scholars world-wide interested in understanding communication processes and patterns in Africa.

Conclusion

The Nairobi meeting of journal editors offers a new opportunity for exploring strategies globalizing 'African knowledge'. Certainly a two-pronged approach as recommended by journal editors ensures participation in existing

distributive mechanisms and creates opportunity for involvement in the evolving global knowledge economy in ways that facilitates Africa's competitiveness. These efforts help ensure that scholarship produced about Africa and Africans in Africa is easily accessible to students and scholars around the world who are interested in studying and understanding Africa. It is hoped that the discussions at the Nairobi meeting will continue in different avenues and at different levels. Finally, it is suggested that a mechanism be put in place by CODESRIA to monitor and measure progress to date on this focused effort to place African scholarship beyond the boundaries of the continent.

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Visibility, Credibility, Prestige: Evaluating the Implications of Indexing African Journals

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Abstract

Start-up problems for a journal include attracting authors and building initial readership, but challenges further down the line include building visibility and maintaining credibility. One of the key strategies in this regard is indexing. According to the literature, the main reasons for having a journal indexed or listed in an abstracting service relate to visibility, and to quality, in terms of credibility and prestige. In this paper, I will look at each of these in more detail. For concrete examples, I will draw upon my experience with indexing an interdisciplinary journal in the social sciences, *Africa Insight*, of which I am currently the editor. Our experience, in a nutshell, has been that getting the journal indexed does create more visibility, and that it certainly confers some credibility – but it has had little effect on the bottom-line of subscriptions and sales.

Key terms: visibility, credibility, prestige, subscriptions, accessibility, indexing, abstracting.

Résumé

Les problèmes de démarrage d'une revue consistent notamment dans les difficultés à susciter l'intérêt d'auteurs et à s'assurer un lectorat initial, mais il y a d'autres défis qui l'attendent en aval, dont la nécessité de se forger une notoriété et de préserver sa crédibilité. Á ce propos, l'indexation figure au nombre des stratégies clés à adopter. Á en juger par la littérature en général, les raisons majeures de faire indexer ou cataloguer une revue résident dans le souci de notoriété et de qualité, en termes de crédibilité et de prestige. L'étude traite chacun de ces facteurs, avec des exemples concrets à l'appui, tirés de l'expérience de l'auteur en matière d'indexation d'une revue interdisciplinaire de sciences sociales, *Africa Insight*, dont elle est actuellement la rédactrice. L'indexation de

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la revue la fait mieux connaître et lui confère assurément une certaine crédibilité, mais cela a une incidence minime sur le chiffre des abonnements et des ventes.

Mots clés: notoriété, crédibilité, prestige, abonnements, accessibilité

Introduction

Every year, millions of new journal articles are published, and new journals are started. Start-up problems for a journal include attracting authors and building initial readership, but further down the line the challenge is how to stand out from the mass of other literature in your field. How do you make readers notice your journal? And, when they do find your journal, how can they be sure that yours is worth reading? How do you attract new authors? And how do you attract subscriptions?

In other words, the challenge is to build visibility and then to maintain and advertise your credibility. Or, to use the three criteria of Kling and McKim (1999) that measure whether or not a scholarly document is effectively published, you need to measure and improve your journal's publicity, trustworthiness and accessibility. They define these three criteria as follows:

* Publicity: the document has to be announced to scholars so that they may learn about its existence. Publicity can be represented by a continuum of activities like subscriptions, reports lists, abstract databases, and citation.
* Trustworthiness: the document has been subject to a social process that assures readers that the content of the document satisfies the norms of quality accepted by the community. Trustworthiness is typically marked by peer review process, social status of the journal, and publishing house quality, but less formally may also be based on the author's reputation and institutional affiliation.
* Accessibility: readers must be able to access the document in a stable manner over time. Libraries, publishers and clearinghouses typically assure accessibility, by distributing and storing the documents.

In this paper, I will be looking at indexing from the point of view of two of these criteria – publicity (visibility) and trustworthiness (credibility). Accessibility is probably the main aim of indexes, but it serves an important purpose in terms of the other two as well.

The main purpose of indexes is simple: they are there to help people – primarily researchers, students and librarians – to search among the millions of articles available, and find articles that are both relevant and of good quality. In other words, the ability to identify academic journals that

publish high-quality research is intended to help researchers to select the most up-to-date literature in their field. Louisa Ha (2003: 193–94) states the case emphatically when she includes among the criteria a journal must meet: "to justify its existence and meet the needs of users and authors", to "be accessible and retrievable easily through various indexing/search services and databases".

Two caveats:

> the exclusion of a journal from an index does not automatically mean that it is not relevant, or that the journal is not peer-reviewed; on the other hand, inclusion in an index also does not automatically mean that more people will find and read your articles.

African journals are, on the whole, poorly covered by the international indexes. To give one example, Adomi and Mordi (2003: 259) note that 'very few Nigerian journals – less than 10% of the whole – are covered by indexing and abstracting services'. We need to look at some of the reasons for this, and we also need to develop strategies to ensure that our journals are well represented on all relevant indexes – possibly, we also need to develop new indexes, that showcase our research in better ways. This is important if we want to be able to make a real contribution to scholarship; we also require recognition for the very good work that is being done in Africa.

Visibility

Increasingly, we are being asked to think on a global scale when looking at publicising our journals – especially since the general thinking is that journals about Africa should, at the very least, reach all of Africa. Readerships are becoming more global, and subscription bases are also becoming international in scope. Thus, an obvious place to turn when looking at creating visibility is the international indexes and abstracting databases.

Indexing is a tool to bring the journal to the attention of all users of an index. Indexing helps to create greater awareness of a journal, and helps readers to locate articles they may not otherwise have found. In addition, the aggregation effect of an index creates both greater visibility for the whole group of journals indexed, and can confer greater respectability on the journals, as they are showcased alongside other publications. Almost all of the main international indexes mention visibility as part of the benefits of being listed with them. Even a non-traditional index, such as African Journals OnLine, notes that, "The objective of AJOL is to provide a window to the research published within the continent, and give greater

visibility to the participating journals, and to the research they convey" (www.ajol.info).

It is important, when considering submitting a journal for indexing, to consider what your objectives are in getting that journal indexed. If visibility is one of your aims, you should first look at defining what you mean by visibility – greater reader awareness, greater library awareness (leading to increased subscriptions), greater author awareness (leading to increased submissions of manuscripts from more parts of the world), or something else – and then consider whether indexing is the best means of achieving this. Being added to an index may well help in improving your overall visibility, but it is probably not going to result in a rush of new subscription orders, for instance. Indexing is often a complementary strategy, working together with a whole host of other strategies, to create the greatest effect for your journal.

At *Africa Insight*, and I am sure at many other journals, it is important for us to showcase research on Africa that is carried out by Africans or that is based on actual experience on the continent. Thus, a key aim for us in having the journal indexed is to create visibility for this often hidden side of scholarship on Africa. We have found, for this aim, that it is not so much the indexes and abstracting services we are listed in that have helped us to achieve this objective, but rather other kinds of aggregators, such as INASP's African Journals OnLine (www.ajol.info).

In terms of general visibility – simply creating greater awareness – the major (very broad and comprehensive) indexes and the appropriate subject-specific indexes are most useful. For a start, almost all research libraries have access to Ulrich's Periodicals Directory or HW Wilson (or both), as well as the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) and the International Bibliography of Social Sciences (IBSS). Then, depending on the fields covered by the library, they would go into the more subject-specific databases. Our journal is listed on Ulrich's and IBSS, as well as indexes such as CAB Abstracts, AfricaBib, African Studies Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, and Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts, and a few foreign-language or less formal indexes. We were listed on some of these simply by sending in a sample copy of the journal, on others by invitation (usually after a researcher has recommended your title to that index), and on still others through personal contacts. I suspect this is the usual mix for most journals.

For a journal starting out in indexing, how do you identify whether your journal is indexed in all the right places? The first place to look is at your

competitors. If they are covered in an index, then you should also be. This is a key aspect of visibility – you should be visible not only to potential readers, authors, and subscribers, but also to your competitors. Secondly, ask your collaborators. Journals that you work with can be an invaluable source of support and information – as this forum shows. If they have managed to get themselves listed on an index that you would like to be listed on, then ask for their experience of getting listed – as well as whether they feel any real benefits have accrued as a result of their inclusion on that index.

One note on journal formats: many databases index both print and online journals. But there are concerns about the long-term archiving of online journals, and we should bear this in mind when considering our own electronic journal strategies.

Of course, in terms of pure visibility, some might say that an indexing service is not strictly necessary in the online environment; as long as you are linked to the major search engines – and especially Google – then students and fellow researchers will be able to find your journal. If it isn't in Google, it (probably) doesn't exist! Apart from the difficulties of refining an Internet browser search to include only relevant items, there is a clear flaw in this line of thinking, and that relates to the other point about indexes that I would like to stress: Google does not provide any indication as to quality or credibility, and it certainly does not provide prestige. Only certain indexes can provide such assurance, the 'stamp of approval', if you like, or Kling and McKim's (1999) second criterion of 'trustworthiness'.

Credibility and prestige

Indexing is also significant, then, for constructing a reference system that gives our scholarship recognition and respect. As in the case of visibility, though, don't over-estimate the importance of indexing in this regard: journals and other scholarly publications are usually evaluated in terms of a number of attributes, including:

* the use of peer review;
* the names on the international editorial board;
* circulation figures, and especially if circulation is international rather than local;
* the author base, and the origins of the authors;

* citations or impact factor (which is often linked to indexing, but which I will not be discussing in this paper).

Being indexed is important for a journal, because it is considered a 'measure of quality if a respected index includes a title' (INASP 2004: 2). For example, many libraries use the ISI citation ranking or impact factor to influence their decision of whether to subscribe to a journal or not. ISI claims to cover all of 'the world's most important and influential journals' (Testa 2002: 1): 'Many factors are taken into account when evaluating journals for coverage, ranging from the qualitative to the quantitative. The journal's basic publishing standards, its editorial content, the international diversity of its authorship, and the citation data associated with it are all considered' (Ibid.).

But not all indexes are equal in this regard: some give you more visibility than prestige, and some may claim to cover only quality journals, but require little in the way of adherence to actual quality guidelines.

Measuring quality

The perception is that inclusion in a respected index confers a degree of respectability on a journal, and affects to some extent its 'reputation'. But do the technical criteria used to select journals for indexes actually provide a measure of quality? The answer is both yes and no, depending on the index.

For most medical indexes, in particular, quality appears to be the key criterion. This is particularly true for indexes in the medical field: 'Scientific merit of a journal's content is the primary consideration in selecting journals for indexing. The validity, importance, originality, and contribution to the coverage of the field of the overall contents of each title are the key factors considered in recommending a title for indexing, whatever the intended purpose of the audience' (Index Medicus, n.d.).

However, this is not the case for all indexes. The most important criterion for selection of a journal for possibly the most respected index, ISI, is in fact not quality, but rather regularity and timeliness of production. If a journal falls behind in its publication schedule, it cannot be listed on ISI – no matter how good it is. The rationale for this is apparently linked to whether a journal is a going concern: 'The ability to publish on time implies a healthy backlog of manuscripts essential for ongoing viability' (Testa 2002: 1). This may indirectly imply that a journal is of high quality, as many submissions are received – Adomi and Mordi (2003: 262). certainly make this case when they argue that 'For a journal to attract the attention of an abstracting and indexing agency, one criterion is regular publication for a

reasonable period of time. During that period, the journal should have acquired a strong editorial board and focus in its area of learning. It follows, therefore, that with a well-established position, such journals are likely to be able to be selective'.

But a backlog of accepted manuscripts could also indicate that people find it easy to get published in that journal, and thus send in many submissions. Or perhaps it could be traced to the fact that the journal receives a subsidy, and thus is not beset by the financial woes which affect many of our journals in Africa, and often have a detrimental effect on publishing schedules. In turn, irregular production does not necessarily reflect on the quality of the journal. Thus, the primary criterion for listing on the ISI does not, in fact, measure quality, although the list and the citation index associated with it do confer credibility.

Apparently more closely related to quality are the criteria of relevance and representivity. If a journal is highly relevant in its field, that likely means it is read by most of the top researchers in that field, and probably publishes the high-profile researchers too. Again, this is not an unproblematic criterion for measuring quality, as not all relevant journals will adhere to strict peer review guidelines – indeed, many news magazines may publish highly relevant information and analysis, without being academically rigorous. At the same time, many journals not listed on indexes may be more relevant for disseminating specific research findings than other journals may be. So, relevance is also a somewhat contested criterion.

Because of the criterion of representivity (on IBSS, this is seen as very important aim, to provide an international perspective on the social sciences), the institutional location of a journal could be seen as a strength. If there is international interest in Africa, then journals based in Africa should stand to benefit.

And several indexes simply indicate whether a journal is peer-reviewed or not – and they take the journal's word for it in this regard! But it could be argued that we always take the journal's word for it. Ulrich's Periodicals Directory and HW Wilson, for instance, are important indexes from the point of view of visibility – and every journal should try to be listed on both of them – but don't be fooled into thinking that they have done any quality checks on the journals they cover. They aim for "accurate and comprehensive serials information" (www.ulrichsweb.com), rather than for a quality control service. A caveat to have in mind when considering this is that almost all indexes are collated and sold for profit – in other words, they are commercial entities rather than benevolent research supports.

Prestige and the South African System

In South Africa, being listed on an index may be about more than just an abstract notion of prestige – it is very closely related to whether one's journal is accredited or not. If accredited, then authors based at South African higher education institutions receive a substantial subsidy from the Department of Education for publishing in that journal. This is fairly high stakes!

The current system of accrediting journals has just been overhauled in South Africa, and – somewhat confusingly – three lists are now being used to determine accreditation. These are: all journals indexed on ISI, all journals indexed on IBSS, and a special list of other journals that have met certain criteria for accreditation but are not indexed on either of these databases. (IBSS is included because of concerns over a perceived bias towards the natural and hard sciences in ISI.)

If one of your aims for your journal is to expand your readership or author base in South Africa, then, it is a good idea to have your journal listed on either ISI or IBSS, so that your journal receives 'automatic' accreditation. Otherwise, you may have to follow a fairly lengthy process in having your journal accredited.

Bias and African journals

The biggest indexes are regularly accused of bias in their treatment of African journals, for several reasons: their use of standard criteria for journal selection, their emphasis on regularity of production, their English-language bias, and so on.

Eugene Garfield (1997), the founder of the ISI, suggests the following reasons for exclusion of journals from 'Third World' countries from the ISI database:

> Many Third World countries suffer by publishing dozens of marginal journals whose reason for being is questionable. I have urged them to combine the best material into larger regional journals to achieve a critical mass. In addition, their local funding sources need to adopt stringent criteria for publication including international peer review.

In other words, journals from 'Third World' countries are not being included because they are of poor quality, include papers of only limited or regional interest, and do not subject their submissions to peer review. Clearly, this is a generalisation, as many developing countries, including African countries, produce very high quality journals. But this is the kind of thinking that may well be encountered when submitting a journal to an international index such as the ISI.

It should be remembered, in this regard, that most indexes were developed for Western audiences, and aim to serve their needs. They also serve to evaluate the journals they cover in terms of a 'universal' standard, which they have themselves developed, and which is applied across the board to all journals, regardless of origin. In other words, they will evaluate our journals as international journals, not as African journals, and certainly not as special cases requiring special criteria – unless they have a specific quota to fill in terms of international journal coverage, but this is the exception. This does not imply, however, that these indexes are biased against African journals, per se, and problems with indexes are often experienced by journals in other developing countries, and even some in the developed world.

If one is looking for information specifically relating to Africa, then there may well be a case to argue that the largest indexes do not sufficiently cover our continent. Only very few services, such as African Journals OnLine and African Studies Abstracts, specifically attempt to cover as many journals from and about Africa as possible, valuing relevance above conformity to a few set criteria. The AfricaBib index also deserves a special mention in this regard, as it was explicitly started to 'fill the gap' as 'few Africana journals were indexed in major indexing tools' (www.africabib.org). This index, which is freely available online, is making an attempt to index all relevant journals on African issues. It should be noted that these are not commercial indexes.

Another, and probably related, issue is that the emphasis on publishing in journals listed on databases such as ISI can become detrimental to the indigenous publishing industry in many African countries. South Africa is an exception because it has specifically tried to counter this by introducing a list of journals that meet strict quality criteria, but are not listed on ISI or IBSS for one or another reason. But most African countries confer more 'points' on their researchers for publishing in established international journals than in their own, local journals. This creates a hierarchy of value, and leads to a perception of lower value of the local journals, even if objectively this is not the case. And those who continue to support the local publishing industry by publishing in such journals lose out both in terms of the assessment of their publishing histories, and in terms of visibility in the international research community. Francis Nyamnjoh (2004: 3) calls this a 'critical choice between sacrificing relevance for recognition or recognition for relevance'. We thus need to look at ways to valorise our own journals, and also to make them visible.

One issue that may affect many African journals (as well as many other journals the world over) is the bias towards English-language journals – especially with international indexes such as ISI. The ISI guidelines state that, 'Although important scientific information is published in all languages, authors must provide English translations of article titles, author keywords, and abstracts if they hope to reach the widest possible audience' (Testa 2002: 1). IBSS provides English Language abstracts for all titles, but notes that up to 30% of the material covered is not in English – a fairly high percentage, by indexing standards (http://www.bids.ac.uk/info/ibss_service_guide.htm). Garfield (1997) notes, perhaps somewhat arrogantly, that 'Any journal which claims international significance will at minimum include English titles and abstracts'.

For the Anglophone African countries, this should not represent much of a problem. For other countries, I would suggest collaboration – working together with colleagues in other countries to provide English-language abstracts, and in turn they could provide foreign-language abstracts, such as French ones. This would improve visibility for both your work and theirs, and encourage the cross-pollination of research conducted in different languages in Africa – research that is often cordoned off into its own areas because of difficulties with translation and understanding.

Conclusion

This paper has raised just a few of the issues around visibility (publicity) and credibility (trustworthiness) as these relate to indexes, based on my own experience.

In a changing and increasingly globally interconnected academic world, and amidst a glut of journals on the market, we need to find ways to make ours stand out. One tool amongst several is having our journals listed in indexing services. Indexes could be seen as a means of valorising what we do, because they provide us with visibility and in some cases credibility. But they do not valorise our work as African scholarship – for that, we either need to support initiatives such as African Journals OnLine, or we need to start our own indexing services to rival those of the West. At the same time, we need to measure our work against the best in the world, without shutting ourselves off into a small enclave.

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Editing African Social Science: Some reflections and suggestions

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Abstract

The present essay examines the challenges and promises of academic publishing in Africa, and offers very useful tips for getting one's ideas in print. The role of the copy editor in this process is also examined.

Key terms: technology, academic publishing, rejection rates, copy editor, writing, refined thinking, CODESRIA Guide for authors

Résumé

L'essai traite des difficultés et des promesses de la publication de revue scientifique en Afrique et donne des indications fort utiles pour faire publier ses idées. Le rôle du rédacteur dans ce processus y est également abordé.

Mots clés : technologie, publication de revue scientifique, taux de rejet, rédacteur, rédaction, relecture, recommandations des auteurs du CODESRIA.

Introduction: Technology solves basically nothing

Great store is set nowadays on the latest technology. It seems much of the time that if only we had the newest and best, from desktop computers to computerised motor vehicles, life would be better, richer, happier. It is of course mostly a lie, generated in large part by the consumerist juggernaut that has enveloped practically all of us. One can appreciate this fact intellectually, but still fail to reject the lie. Most of us do just that. The present writer is no exception. Currently my life revolves around my new computer, my new high-speed always-on Internet connection, and my son's obsessive concerns with obtaining the latest branded goods for himself and also for his parents. He is ashamed that we do not drive a

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Mercedes Kompressor or the like, go on frequent holidays to 'the Continent' or Mauritius, equip our house with plasma TVs, and buy him the iPods, X-Boxes and Nikes that his friends seem to get as a matter of course.

I exaggerate, naturally. Especially as concerns my son. He is basically interested in doing well in Anglo sports such as rugby and cricket, and in other physical achievements for which technology is little help. He craves the adulation of the crowds as he hits a four or scores a try, just as an American kid wishes to belt a home run or make a touchdown. He seeks that adrenaline rush that only public personal achievement can bring. And the account of my own pre-occupations is likewise distorted. My new computer keeps on crashing and my Internet connection has been down for the last ten days. The technology has in some ways created more problems than it has solved. It is also unable to solve, in principle, my really pressing concerns, like how to write this article. Hence the hyperbole: technology solves basically nothing. Perhaps I should add: for a solvent, not yet unhealthy, socially un-marginalised individual. It might be otherwise if I was penniless and desperately ill.

It might seem that academic life has been transformed for the better in the last couple of decades by technology, and in some ways it has. Here the computer is central, for me at least, and not as a metaphor either. My work is computer-based. It is sent to me by e-mail, the work itself is processed on a highly complex programme (usually WordPerfect), and the result is stored and re-transmitted by this most iconic of modern artefacts. I can no longer compose anything in longhand, and have almost lost the skill of handwriting (legibly at least). Many of us cannot in fact ignore this technology or live without it. But the technology cannot write an article or edit one, except for the most mechanical tasks like Spell-Checker. I don't really need Spell-Checker in my life because I can in fact spell. Of course it has its uses. The technology certainly has not made me a better, happier person. It has solved nothing, basically. Nothing brings home this fact like that most important of academic routines: writing. And as someone who spends most of his working hours at present in correcting other people's writing, technology has displaced the personal, human element in only the most peripheral of ways.

The academic editor

The foregoing remarks are fully applicable to that rather invisible, little regarded and very forgettable figure, the academic (copy) editor. Nothing much has changed in the basic functions of the person who handles academic manuscripts for possible publication. The skills (if they can be

so dignified) are really not technology-based, although the technology may facilitate their execution. Nor has technology resolved the social context to the greater satisfaction of all parties. Academic editing tends to be a thankless task. Academics take the existence of journals for granted. Their interaction with copy-editors – and editors in general – assumes the form more of complaints than gratitude. An editor soon learns this fact of life, and may become somewhat cynical about his colleagues in the grand intellectual endeavour of social science. Cynicism of course is a corrosive attitude and only a pale substitute for editorial wisdom. I will try to avoid allowing it to leak over into these scattered reflections.

Editing in Africa gives rise to some conflicting feelings. The first one is in a sense political. The power dynamics in publishing about Africa - as in so many other areas - are heavily biased against the indigenous worker. The leading journals in the field, the most authoritative voices, are for the most part located outside of the continent. Much of the best local scholarship itself goes overseas, to appear in the pages of *African Affairs*, *The Journal of Modern African Studies, The Journal of Southern African Studies* and so on. It is hard to avoid feelings of resentment about the fact that First World academics are making their careers on the back of our continent, as are publishing firms in London, Oxford and New York. But of course these feelings are usually counter-productive. We cannot kick against the pricks, but must harden ourselves to tackle the problem head-on. That problem can only be met in the long run by a positive African response.

There are a number of factors that work in favour of local publishing. The first is cost: it is possible to make available journals edited and printed in Africa at a fraction of the ridiculous prices that the increasingly commercialised academic journals in Europe and the US demand. The second is proximity. We are here, and in principle we know best. The issue is to harness this local knowledge, infuse confidence in the rising generation of African scholars, and produce work that can equal any published on the outside.

The third factor is that African scholars are increasingly a self-conscious community, who can lend each other the support and organisation that must underpin individual effort. In this respect the achievements of CODESRIA constitute a beacon to others. One example is the role that the Council played in establishing the *African Sociological Review*, a successful venture in cross-border collaboration.

Of course publishing one's academic work locally may occasion feelings of isolation and futility. So what if we publish something of which we are proud in a local journal? Is it not destined to languish unread and un-

known? There is of course some substance to this worry. The answer is that the proper marketing and distribution of African intellectual production are tasks that can no longer be shirked. We need much better continental lists of African social scientists. And Internet and on-line publishing – as a means to an end, and not an end in itself – should enjoy a concerted effort by African academics and editors, a programme now actively pursued by CODESRIA.

A final point I would like to make here concerns the fate of most manuscripts submitted to local journals. I do not know what the situation is with other journals, but my own experience and that of my fellow editors has been that the bulk of submissions are not up to the standard that one expects for a peer-reviewed publication. Rejection rates are high, and it all seems a waste of talent and effort. The issue is one to which reference will be made again later on.

The process of editing

Editing is parasitical upon writing. But the editor as parasite is not guaranteed an easy life. In principle, the whole process is fairly straightforward. Manuscripts come in, either commissioned or unsolicited, and are scanned. At this stage many will be rejected and no further processing will take place. This may seem a gratuitous responsibility that an editor takes on, but it is no use wasting the time of referees with articles that you know are going to be rejected, or which you consider unsalvageable. Referees on whom you can rely are not in plentiful supply, and they tend to be busy people. They are doing you a favour by sending in a report on an article sent them. An editor who is not entrusted with this capacity to reject at the first stage is also not going to be easy to find. I know some academics think that this is an unfair practice, but in our circumstances it is unavoidable in my opinion.

Matters become more complicated after the first scan. An article that seems possibly publishable, with however many private qualifications on the part of an editor, must go to referees. Referees are unpredictable and differ in their approach. Some will provide helpful, constructive comments for the author. If they do, the article must go back to the author for revisions. Many referees are too busy to do so. If the referees are positive, then the article is ready for copy-editing.

The travails of copy-editing

Copy-editing can be easy or onerous. Most articles are publishable only after a copy-editor has gone through them picking up all (well, hopefully

all!) the flaws – of language, logic, fact, structure and referencing. There are not many articles that come in without some mistakes – even the best of authors will slip up now and again. At its most burdensome, copy-editing requires a painstaking check of each sentence and frequent corrections. At times, this editing will amount to re-writing what was in the original manuscript. This is a delicate matter, but cannot be glossed over. Authors frequently present original and interesting material, but their prose and overall presentation may be verbose, ungrammatical and unstructured. Such work could of course be referred back to the author, but experience suggests that short of an intensive one-on-one tutorial the presentation is not going to improve. The copy editor must step in and rescue it. The amount of salvage work required may vary tremendously, sometimes verging on very intrusive re-writing. Whether this accords with academic ethics or not, I am never quite sure. But it may be so obviously required that a copy-editor cannot duck the obligation. The question that poses itself is: is there a sound kernel here that with editorial assistance could be made to emerge? If so, then intervention seems a plain duty. Perhaps the only problem I have with this activity is that authors rarely object, but they even more rarely thank you for polishing their raw thoughts.

Trivial pursuit: Cleaning up the small matters

Copy-editors soon become aware of the standard shortcomings of the manuscripts coming their way. They learn to look out for them and to correct them without a sigh. Of course many of the most trivial issues could be avoided if authors took the trouble to study the style-guides that most publications offer would-be contributors. For example, Sulaiman Adebowale and his colleagues over the years in Dakar have put together an excellent pamphlet, *CODESRIA: Guide for Authors*, readily available for reading or downloading on the Council's web-site. The trouble is that most contributors seem not to read it, or do so only cursorily, much like students who hardly glance at the detailed and creative course outlines that conscientious university lecturers compile. As a result, the copy-editor encounters the same old errors time and again. Here are some of the most common:

– Inconsistent text layout, including headings, lists and paragraphing. One example of this problem is the highly irritating use of numbering of sections, sub-sections and so on. How often the author loses count and an article purporting to comprise of six sections contains only five - or vice versa! As the *CODESRIA Guide* plaintively requests, 'Please keep text layout simple'.

– The use of full justification of copy, instead of simple left justification, despite the express remark on this issue in the CODESRIA Guide. The latter may look untidy but it makes for a much cleaner text for the copy-editor and printer. Do not format with JUST-FULL because it looks better to you.

– The excessive use of bullets and other MSWord gadgets. When authors go to town on bullets, the result is a presentation that looks – and reads – like a laundry list. Bulleting is often a sign of lazy writers who cannot be bothered to put together a coherent narrative. If you must do the list thing, like I am doing here, simply start each point with a dash. Try also to make something substantial of the point, not a mere naming of an issue.

– Lackadaisical or excessive automatic footnoting. Now that word processors allow authors simply to slot in footnotes by pressing their mouse, some articles (historians and legal people please note!) consist of a forest of numbers and notes. The copy-editor must change these numbers and footnotes, sometimes running to a hundred or more, into plain text. It is a time consuming task. The worst however is the case where the author fails to run the automatic footnote facility correctly, and the numbering system goes awry. The correction of chaotic footnotes is one of the copy-editor's biggest nightmares, and an all too frequent one. How can writers be so oblivious of such an egregious error? Obviously, they do not read their completed product with any care, or otherwise they would note, to take an actual recent example of my own, that ftn. #94 is empty of content.

– The mistaken impression that tables and diagrams – the more the merrier - enhance the writing. Nothing could be more mistaken. Tables present a headache to copy-editors and printers alike, and anyway readers often just skip them. Use these techniques only when really necessary, and *do not* produce full-colour figures. Full colour printing is too expensive and rarely within the budget of the academic publisher. Include them if you wish but they will just get deleted without a qualm by the copy-editor.

– The use of US-English: CODESRIA's very explicit policy is to standardise in UK-English. I have no quarrel with that. But many if not most academics today use US-English, if only because it is the default setting in MSWord. One might argue that we in Africa could decide to allow either version of English. But since the policy is UK-English, it requires only a little effort to change the language setting on MSWord (Tools-Language-Set Language). Another facet of this issue is the inconsistent use of either dialect: authors liberally help themselves to both versions of the spelling of, say, *organisation* – and the result is unpleasing to the eye and irritating to the mind.

– In an age when MSWord has automated so many writing tasks, it is surprising how many spelling errors some articles contain. Please run Spell-Check (in UK-English) and correct mistakes. The presence of one or two spelling errors in a piece is the norm, but when every page contains two or three one has to wonder how conscientiously the writer has gone about the work.

– Finally, there is a standard way of formatting references in the list at the end of an article. CODESRIA's own format is very simple and logical. Very few authors however bother even to master this basic procedure. One comes to expect that, but much worse is the unsystematic and incomplete referencing that many authors allow themselves - in any format. Sloppy referencing is often an indication of more serious deficiencies at the level of intellectual endeavour.

The preceding list is far from complete. It merely indicates the common problems facing probably all academic copy-editors. But when an article is rife with these kinds of shortcomings, there will be an inclination to consider whether the actual content is not also the product of a careless and poorly prepared writer.

Here I would like to digress to speak about a practice that the *South African Sociological Review* followed, and which the *African Sociological Review* has continued. In order to save money, material for the printer is not only copy-edited for language and so on, but also to lessen the work the printer must put into loading an article into their publishing programme. Printers do not use the standard word-processing programmes such as MSWord or WordPerfect, but have to download copy into a programme such as Ventura or Adobe Pagemaker. Such programmes work more quickly without the numerous formatting and other commands that word-processing puts into copy. These commands must usually be stripped out by the printer's setter – which costs money. Journal publishing can be made considerably cheaper if the editor and associates present copy that has been stripped out with the minimal amount of commands retained. This is a time-consuming exercise. Nothing taxes an editor's patience as much as authors who likes to use all the high-tech resources of the programme at their disposal and makes the article look like a pretty picture. This problem is particularly acute with MSWord, and it is one of the minor tragedies of our time that this software has become dominant in the market. For an editor, the programme of choice is WordPerfect with its crystal clear editing facility that enables one to see all the commands smuggled into the text as one writes. They can then be deleted and the printer handed a relatively stripped down version almost ready for the machine.

The process of writing

Writing a coherent piece of work is one of the most demanding of human tasks. For most people, including myself, it is arduous and nerve-wracking. Writing, as the American author Stephen King put it, is *refined thinking*. The emphasis here is on refinement. One must take the untreated ore of one's mental processes, smelt it and hammer it into a shape that is acceptable and pleasing to others. The whole process is fraught with uncertainty. You can never be sure that what you think is rather good will elicit the same response from others. Often it will not be, and one of the most useful lessons one can ever learn is to receive incisive - but hopefully constructive - criticism on what you have written. It once happened to me, and although the criticism was more destructive than constructive, it taught me something that I never forgot: *never think that writing comes easily*. There are exceptional people of course for whom the words simply flow and the result is sheer genius. Shakespeare was apparently one such writer, according to those who worked with him. But for most of us the struggle begins as soon as we are faced with the blank page. Those who say otherwise are often, in my experience, very weak writers indeed.

For the majority of African scholars the situation is complicated by the fact that they are writing in a second or third language. This fact is reflected in the standard of English in manuscripts that come one's way. By and large the problem shows itself in minor grammatical mistakes and the wrong choice of vocabulary. These matters are easily fixed at the copy-editing stage. Nevertheless, as English ripples out ever wider and inexorably across the globe as the international lingua franca and the language of science in particular, English second language writers have perforce to come to terms with it. (I shall not speak about French second language writers, as my French is not good enough to assess the linguistic standard of French manuscripts, although it is obviously a key issue for us here in Africa.) There is much to be said for scientific work in vernaculars. But scientists today, social scientists included, must also produce in international communications. The Dutch, for example, have long learned to do this. There is a flourishing social scientific literature in Dutch, but just about all Dutch scholars will also sooner or later find themselves writing in English. There are no easy answers to acquiring the necessary competence in writing academic English. Read a lot, write as much as you can, and look for people who can give you sympathetic comment on what you have produced. As the Italians say, one learns by making mistakes.

It is a commonplace that the core functions of an academic are teaching and research. The latter implies a command of writing skills. It is

indeed ironic that at the very heart of our jobs very little thorough training is provided, either as to how to teach or how to write. Perhaps the situation is improving nowadays at universities, although nothing much has changed in my own country, apart from perfunctory gestures at inducting new lecturers. But of course like any skill, teaching and writing can be improved by training. Lacking formal programmes in writing skills, most academics have to teach themselves. It is of concern that many do not appear even to make the attempt.

In a communication like this one, it would be an impertinence to attempt a tutorial on how to write. But in the spirit of sharing and receiving advice, let me list some obvious points that many academics could do well to follow, particularly if they are struggling to get published.

Preparing to write

– *Make sure that you have mastered your subjec*t, and in particular that you are not re-inventing the wheel. Have you explored the major literature in the field? If there are classics on the topic on which you are writing, you will receive a very sceptical reception if you do not at least show a passing acquaintance with them. With regard to African society, and depending on your topic, it looks very bad if you seem blithely unaware of the work of the early indigenous pioneers such as J. H. Soga, H. and O. Johnson, J. B. Danquah and Jomo Kenyatta, to mention a few, or of the best of colonial anthropologists like Isaac Schapera, E.E. Evans-Pritchard or Meyer Fortes. These were people in an unparalleled position to sketch the parameters of many topics relevant to contemporary Africa, no matter the reservations that later writers may have justly developed about them.

– Try to ensure that you are *up-to-date in the subject of concern*. For many of us in Africa this demand is often insuperable. Libraries are poorly stocked and the Internet has just gone down or refuses you access to journals on commercial grounds (your university cannot afford the outrageous subscriptions). Nevertheless, try your best and at least consult the Table of Contents of the major relevant journals of 'Euro-America', as well as African sources.

– *Prepare but do not over-prepar*e. At some point all of us must stop reading and start writing. There comes a point of diminishing returns with every reference consulted. Too much reading can be as hazardous as too little. Always try to keep the main ideas you wish to develop at the forefront of your mind and not let them be drowned by information overload. This remark may seem to contradict the previous ones, but one must acquire the judgment as to

when one is ready to write, and still not be embarrassed by ignorance of relevant work.

Doing the writing

Writing is a deeply mysterious activity, based on processes occurring in some of many rooms in our brain which are not accessible to the conscious mind. We speak, we write, but the very activities are going on below the horizon, as it were. Brain science will no doubt soon demystify the nature of these processes somewhat, but it is unlikely that it will enable us to jump the barrier between our conscious cerebrations and the underground computations that make them possible. What is possible, however, is to view the product of this activity of writing, and to make decisions about how to improve what has bubbled up from below. Here are some suggestions.

– *Start writing*. For many people, the present writer included, the hardest task of all is to sit down and to start to write. There are many creative ways of starting to write (and even more of not starting), but what works for one may not work for another. Just do it, or as E. M. Forster once exclaimed (in print): 'Only begin!' Once a page or two has appeared, the task usually becomes much easier.

– *Avoid second-hand thinking*. Originality is a rare thing, but we all have our own ideas and our own voices, if we dig deep enough. Express them, as best you can, and do not slavishly follow fads and trends current in your academic milieu. Use them if you wish, but adapt them to what you have to say. And cut out the academic clichés that go along with so many intellectual fashions. Let your thoughts drive the words, rather than vice versa.

Shorten your sentences. Most academics, and I include senior academics and also myself, are guilty of dragging out our sentences, and overloading them with material because we are afraid to leave anything out, and want to squeeze in as much as we can at the same time. (This last sentence is an example.) Many sentences can simply be cut in half, as could mine here. We are no longer in the era of long, eloquent sentences.

Learn how to write a proper paragraph. Paragraphs are the basic building blocks of most prose. One rule, which is a bit mechanical but works well, is to express only one main point per paragraph, with the rest of the sentences acting as elaboration, substantiation and so on. Stephen King puts this point well in his book *On Writing*, which I re-read before

starting to write these remarks. He calls the main point the 'topic sentence', and it usually comes first.

Edit your writing and cut out superfluous words and repetitive thoughts. A competent and industrious copy-editor can often shorten a piece of writing by a quarter by adopting this rule. Try it yourself.

Finally, use the Spell-check and Grammar-check on your word-processing programme, if only to spare the copy-editor from frowning continually. And keep a good dictionary close to hand.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most important rule of all for the younger academic is to *practise* writing. One way of doing this while also getting your work in print is to write book reviews. It is surprising how few academics bother to write reviews. If you can write a decent book review, you can write a decent article, with practice. I think all of us in the game of academic publishing could do a lot more to bring on younger scholars by insisting that they publish book reviews if they are not ready to write up research or theory. The basic skills are very similar. In this spirit, Fred Hendricks and his colleagues on the *African Sociological Review* have also attempted to enlarge the scope for publication by introducing sections in the journal such as *Research Reports* and *Debates*. These sections are in part intended to encourage younger social scientists to produce work that while not really of article standard is yet a real contribution.

It is really not hard to get one's work published, provided that the writer persists with the task and thinks about how to write. The writing is the hard part, not the publishing. That returns me to my earlier point about the high rejection rates that journals experience, including the African Sociological Review. No editor enjoys rejecting submissions, no more than most lecturers enjoy failing students. Many submissions to journals such as the Review are rejected although they contain something that is of interest to the readers. The reason often is that the writer has not got it right in terms of formulation and logic, and then the whole piece goes awry. We in Africa need to remember that we are very often the experts on topics that few outsiders will examine. If we write what we know in a way that meets the basic criteria of intellectual intercourse, if we consciously strive to *deepen* our arguments in lucid language, if we remember that copy-editors are ruthless and uncaring people, then current rejection rates will plummet.

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Peer-review and the Electronic Journal: Opportunities for the participation of developing countries' scientists in mainstream science

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Abstract

This paper traces the origin and evolution of the peer review process, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses to date. The author suggests that technology offers new opportunities for automated non-blinded open review process in which the identities of the author and the reviewer are not shielded. This approach, the author argues, conforms with the openness culture of the Internet. Options and strategies for effecting this type of review process are suggested.

Key terms: peer review, electronic journal, blind review, mainstream science

Résumé

Le document retrace l'origine et l'évolution du mécanisme d'évaluation scientifique en soulignant ses points forts et ses faiblesses à ce jour. L'auteur affirme que la technologie offre de nouvelles formules d'évaluation scientifique collégial automatique et ouvert, où l'identité de l'auteur et du spécialiste n'est pas masquée. Cette approche, selon l'auteur, s'inscrit dans le droit fil de la culture d'ouverture de l'Internet. Des formules et des stratégies à adopter pour ce type d'évaluation sont suggérées.

Mots clés : évaluation scientifique, processus de revue scientifique, électronique, évaluation confidentiel, périodique

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Introduction

The twin *debut of Journal de Scavans* in France and *Philosophical Transactions in Britain aroun*d the middle of the 17th century marked the beginning of the over 300 years regime of the print journal as a format for science communication. The birth of the print journal arose due to the intersection of a number of social forces and advances in technology. These forces and advances include the development and improvement of the postal service system, and the discovery of printing in Europe (Eisenstein, 1979, Cronin 2002). There was also a shift in scholarly attitudes towards sharing established knowledge based on observations and experimentation (Kronick, 1962). Since the 17th century therefore, journals and other primary sources have governed the science communication protocols, fulfilling, although not flawlessly, the expectation that scientists in different peer communities could be interconnected for mutual sharing of ideas and research results. With increasing stratification of knowledge and institutionalization of science, the ability to contribute to knowledge through the journal media has become very significant. As a result, the number of journals globally has grown inestimably, with each community of scientists seeking to promote the chances that its members would have their ideas printed in the scholarly tabloid.

From the angle of science communication, the aims of the journal include the encouragement of the scholarly enterprise, the publication and dissemination of research, and the reporting and prioritization of what is new in the scientific community. During the earliest stages of the modern print journals, journals fulfilled these expectations by receiving and publishing articles sent to them by authors. Questions were rarely asked about the authenticity of the content of the articles, or whether the articles had been published elsewhere. The scientific texts were accepted on their own merits within the prevailing notions of "civility and gentlemanly conduct" (Foucault 1977). In those days, the same articles could be published in as many journals as the author wished, enabling the author to reach different audiences of his or her choice. What then brought about the institution of peer review?

The origin of peer review

There is a relative consensus that the institution of peer review was probably formally established in 1752 when the Royal Society of London formed a Committee of Papers, to review all articles submitted to *Philosophical Transactions*, and to ensure that the articles contributed to knowledge (Zuckerman 1971, Burnham 1990). To this end, the editor of the journal

read the articles with the help of some editorial assistants. With increasing competition among journals and their publishers, individual journal publishers initiated policies to give them competitive advantage over other similar journals. Journal publishers also started asserting control over the right of ownership of the published article, and a dichotomy was established between ownership of the journal article and the copyright of the article.

In 1969, Franz Ingelfinger, editor of *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)* instituted a policy that his journal would reject any paper that had been published - in whole or in part – in any other journal. Ingelfinger's policy began as an economic decision to improve the market rating of his journal. Thereafter, Arnold Relman, the next editor of NEJM continued this policy, and noted that it was the responsibility of peer reviewers to ensure that articles published in *NEJM* would be confirmed not to have been published elsewhere (Altman 1996). For more than thirty years now, peer review has acquired a new purpose—a strategy for sieving articles that had been published elsewhere, so that they do not feature in *NEJM*. With increasing use of the journals as communication media, coupled with increasing competition among scholars for tenure, the fear that wrong claims could feature in the prestigious *NEJM* motivated Relman to include a third point in the peer review process—to ascertain the authenticity of the articles sent to *NEJM* for publication. With the policies at NEJM, the peer review process has since been held to be the mechanism for ensuring the high quality, non-duplication, and originality of publications.

According to El-Munshid (2000), there is a general consensus among scholars now that peer review, commonly involving the use of targeted and anonymous referees chosen by knowledgeable editors, is widely accepted within the scientific community at large because it:

- provides expert and impartial evaluation of manuscripts and acts as a gatekeeper that ensures high standards for published scientific articles.
- improves the quality of manuscripts through the constructive criticisms of the reviewers.
- helps direct articles to the appropriate journals through some form of advice often communicated to the authors.
- frees the publication from the domination of any particular individual's preferences, making it answerable to the peer community as a whole- within the discipline or specialty (Harnad 1985).

Constraints of Peer Review

Peer review is a subjective process with clear fallibilities. Readings (1994) was too sharp in his observation regarding this, particularly as it affects younger scholars.

> Normally, those who review essays for inclusion in scholarly journals know what they are supposed to do. Their function is to take exciting, innovative, and challenging work by younger scholars and find reasons to reject it. The same goes for book manuscripts: one receives a hundred dollars for rejecting a manuscript, but if you suggest that it should be published, the check never seems to arrive (Altman 1994).

Peer review cannot ensure the validity of a study's data, and many journals do not even clearly describe their policies and practices. Articles can pass peer reviews, but might have been developed based on faulty and fraudulent data. Evidence to this can be cited from the many revelations of the international medical journal editors regarding the level of infelicity in primary research articles which passed through peer review oversight (Flanagin 1994). In a recent article, Hirschauer (2004) has even suggested that peer review is not a scientific measurement of the quality of publications, but a social institution for the calibration of reading time within a discipline.

Bias of peer reviewers may be based on gender, ethnicity or geographical location, research approach, and the favor for one's discipline. There could also be some bias in peer review when renowned authors (with a history of many publiscations or association with a prestigious institution) are treated with leniency, even when they have submitted articles are a somewhat suspect in quality and content. Another serious type of bias occurs when a hypothesis relating to the mainstream thinking is favoured in preference for those opposing what may be called conventional wisdom (Ernst, 2000). Others have pointed to gender bias in the process because peer reviewers are predominantly male. A good case was documented in the *British Medical Journal* (Lock *et al*. 1990). Gilbert *et al*. (1994) have also performed a comprehensive study of gender bias in the *JAMA* peer review process. To determine gender bias, Gilbert *et al*. analysed information on the handling of 1851 research manuscripts submitted to *JAMA* in 1991 according to the gender of the corresponding author, assigned editor or the peer reviewers. They found that female editors were assigned manuscripts from female corresponding authors more than male editors; also male reviewers assisted the latter more than female editors. They concluded that gender differences exist in the peer review process.

Bias in peer review has also been related to institutional prestige. The study of Garfunkel *et al* (1994) proved this aptly. They conducted a retrospective study at the *Journal of Paediatrics* in order to identify the extent to which institutional prestige affects peer review in the United States. They determined institutional prestige according to the monetary value of grants funded by the National Institutes of Health so that those that attracted higher grant volumes were ranked as more prestigious. Their results showed that for 147 brief reports, lower institutional rank was associated with lower rates of reviewer recommendation and selection for publication.

Further in this regard, Link (1998) investigated and showed that the source of a manuscript at the international level biases peer reviewers. Using seventy percent of manuscripts submitted to *Gastroenterology* reviewers,' rankings of original manuscripts submitted to this journal in 1995 and 1996 were subjected to analysis based on the nationality of authors and reviewers. The result showed that US reviewers when compared to-non-US reviewers, favored US papers over-non-US papers and ranked US papers higher and assigned them a higher acceptance status. Thus, there was a clear preference by US reviewers for US papers.

Another study examined whether there is peer reviewer bias against unconventional therapy (Resch 2000). The study consisted of sending either of two invented versions of a short report on treatment of obesity to 398 randomized reviewers of whom only 41.7% replied. One version reported the results when using an orthodox drug while the second used a homeopathic remedy. The reviewers were requested to rate importance on a scale of 1 to 5 and to recommend either acceptance or rejection of the manuscript. There was a significant difference in favor of the orthodox version.

Peer review has also been argued to tend to stifle originality by blocking new ideas that are outside the mainstream or that seem to contradict established conventional wisdom. A number of commentators (Agger, 1990; Readings, 1994) argue that scholarly refereeing is inherently conservative. Those selected to be referees, at least for 'established' international periodicals, are generally 'recognised' scholars in their field who have already passed through the various publication hoops themselves. Original work, which challenges orthodox views, while ostensibly encouraged, is in practice frequently impeded by academics that have a stake in keeping innovative critical scholarship out of respected journals. For if a contributor to a major journal rubs against the grain of conventional scholarly wisdom in a given discipline, it is likely his or her submitted manuscript will

have to pass through the hands of one or more academics who are prime representatives of prevailing opinion.

Furthermore, peer review tends to render a certain proportion of scientists unnecessarily very powerful. In journal review, much depends on the goodwill of editors. Anecdotal tales of being 'set up' by editors abound in academic corridors. Such experiences where referees known to be especially 'vicious' in their criticisms, or to have strong prejudices against particular perspectives are selected, can be devastating for beginning scholars setting out on the path to an academic career. Equally, of course, there is considerable satisfaction for authors when they encounter conscientious referees who submit their reports promptly, with balanced comments, fair criticisms, and constructive suggestions for improvement.

Indeed, on many occasions, referees perform an invaluable service in identifying faults the author may not have noticed - faults that if left unattended, could prove professionally embarrassing. Undertaking refereeing duties takes considerable time and effort to read scholarly papers and to respond to them thoughtfully. Agger (1990) maintains that, given the shortage of journal space and the abundance of manuscripts in most fields of study, the balance of power at present rests very much in the hands of those who edit, review for, and produce the journals. There is, his analysis suggests, simply not enough room for everybody - at least not in 'respected', international journals. Agger claims that much of the writing produced by academics is either never published or ends up in local, unrefereed sources. As a result, it remains - as far as the international scholarly community is concerned - largely 'invisible'. Agger observes:

> Academic reviewing becomes even nastier in an extremely competitive marketplace.... [I]t is no longer enough in many disciplines to have two strongly positive reviews and one lukewarm one; all three must be sterling given the rate at which writers submit papers for publication. In this climate, reviewers learn (and teach themselves, circularly) not to read generously but to target the smallest issues in their overall evaluation (Agger 1990).

Peer review also delays publication of research results. Some of the potential problems with peer review are intensified by the sluggishness of print and post systems, although the emergence of the internet is helping to change this difficulty. In the developing countries, these problems are more manifest. There are delays in sending and receiving of letters, and this can make it difficult for authors to quickly resolve problems with unresponsive editors and referees. In fact, these delays sometimes invalidate the result of a

research when there is new knowledge or technique that alters, perhaps what is contained in an article that is yet undergoing the peer review.
Given these challenges, one is tempted to ask: do we still need peer review?

Peer review is inevitable but we need a radical change

The problems associated with peer review notwithstanding, refereeing is an important part of the scholarship enterprise. Without some sort of rigorous mechanism for judging academic work, the publication of scholarly articles and monographs can become somewhat an incestuous process. As a result it is suggested that standard refereeing practices should remain an important mechanism for sieving the information that go to readers. Peer review is a critical component in the competition between rival journals because good refereeing and editing raise the perceived quality and increases reader appeal. With increased quality comes increased citation of published articles in scientific work. Highly cited journals attract more submissions, so that high quality is inevitably associated with a high rejection rate. It follows that quality journals spend more on the refereeing process, and that much of the investment appears to be wasted on rejected, and hence unremunerative, materials. However, the manual method seems to exacerbate the limitations of the peer review process. Harnad (1992, 1996), Stodolsky (1993, 1994), Sosteric (1996) and others have suggested that there are other emerging systems that will minimize the human limitations that becloud the peer review process. Several factors have impacted upon, and transformed the way science is done today on the institution of peer review. For instance, the exponential growth of science has given rise to tough competition for research funding and publication, and consequently a heavy strain on the process of peer review or even its corruption. The major external factor has been the advent of electronic publishing. The speed and convenience of the electronic medium has reduced the lag time between submission of a paper and its publication and increased the options for interactions between editors, authors and readers. It is appropriate to suggest a radical change in the peer review process harnessing the most modern and effective technology namely the Internet.

The critical activities involved in the peer review process namely reading and assessing of the article for publication will remain human function for a very long time to come. Except and until the electronic revolution becomes sufficiently sophisticated so that a computer, for instance, can write or read an article, and also assess a scientific article, the human function will continue to exist. What then will be the role of electronic facilities in the peer review process? The critical role of electronic facili-

ties in the process will consist of the management of those activities that cause delay and bias in the process.

Peer review functions fall within the category of activities that could be considered computerisable. The process is repetitious and the volume of activities is very large. All the activities involved in peer-reviewing an article can therefore be computer- aided. A typical process of reviewing an article begins with a submission made by an author or authors. This usually follows a call made by the journal through various forms of advertisements both in the journal in question or other media. The journal has an Editor and, or an Editorial Board. With some journals, it is the Editor in Chief who in consultation with other members of the board, selects the referees usually one or two per manuscript, and a third or more consulted to avoid a possible deadlock. The referees advise the Editor(s) by evaluating the manuscript and making recommendations about acceptance, or, rejection and or revision. The reports' referees are usually advisory rather than binding on the Editor, who makes the actual decision, although a good Editor often chooses his/her referees' recommendation. The article is returned to the author if it requires some revision. Otherwise, the author is informed whether the article is accepted or not. This whole process takes a very long time and can be quite tedious and expensive.

Harnad (1996) has described the benefits of the electronic alternative.

> But the Net does offer the possibility of distributing the burdens of peer review more equitably, selecting referees on a broader and more systematic basis (electronic surveys of the literature, citation analysis, even posting calls for reviewers to pertinent professional experts' bulletin boards and allowing those who happen to have the time to volunteer themselves). The speed with which a manuscript can be circulated electronically is also an advantage, as is the convenience that many are discovering in reading and commenting on manuscripts exclusively on-screen. All in all, implementing the traditional peer review system purely electronically is not only eminently possible, but is likely to turn out to be optimal, with even paper journal editors preferring to conduct refereeing in the electronic medium (Hanard 1996).

It is not clear whether we have realized the relative advantage of the Net where people are required to make decisions such as reviewing and editing, which still take time. Copyediting is much faster as the bulk of the formatting is done automatically. Database entry will be minimized as the authors and the software do the bulk of this work. No paid staff, or at most a minimum number, will be required to do any of the tasks. All correspondences will be conducted by email. Formatting, for both copyediting and publication,

will be done by software. Printing, postage, telephone and other distribution costs will be completely eliminated, as the journal will be published only online. E-review process will de-centralise the review process and enable platform independence. But how can we achieve peer review on the Net? Our approach here is rather radical.

Automated non-blinded open peer review

We suggest not only an electronic peer review system but also a completely open peer review type in which the identities of the authors and reviewers are not shielded from each other. This suggestion follows evidence that blinding peers is of no significant effect in the quality of the article, and the inherent openness of Internet activities.

Several studies have investigated the effects of blinding reviewers on the quality of reviews. The first significant study was a presentation by McNutt *et al* (1990). They sent each of 123 manuscripts at the *Journal of General Internal Medicine* to two different reviewers: one blinded and the other non-blinded. The reviewers were allowed the choice of whether or not to sign their reports. Editors were blinded to the identities of both the authors and reviewers. They removed the identities of the authors, running headers and footers and any other clue in the text, and also the names of their institutions from the manuscript's title page. But self-citations were not removed. They concluded that blinding was 73% successful, and that the causes of unblinding were recognition of authors from self-citations, knowledge of the authors' work, or an editorial error. The principal result was that editors graded the quality of blinded reviews significantly better than the unblinded reviews. Forty-three percent of the reviewers chose to sign their reviews: editors graded signers as more constructive and courteous while authors graded signers as fairer. Apart from this study, three subsequent studies failed to confirm that blinding improved the quality of reviews in any way.

The study of Van Rooyen *et al* (1998) is also significant in this regard. They randomized 527 consecutive manuscripts submitted to the *BMJ* and sent each to two reviewers, one blinded and the other unblinded to authors' identities, with either masking or unmasking of a reviewers' identity to a co-reviewer. The authors concluded that blinding and unmasking made no editorially significant difference to review quality, reviewers' recommendations, or time taken to review. The experiment of Godlee et. al. (1998) in which eight areas of weakness were introduced into a paper accepted for publication and sent to 420 reviewers randomized to blinding or unblinding, signing or not signing reports, plus a fifth group treated in the

usual way, is also significant. They discovered that blinding reviewers to authors' identity and requiring them to sign their reports had no effect on the rate of detection of errors. Furthermore, Justice *et al* (1998) used 118 manuscripts at five biomedical journals where the normal practice was non-blinding of reviewers, except for the *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, where reviewers are routinely blinded. The authors sent each manuscript to two reviewers, with the manuscripts randomly assigned either to normal practice, or to an intervention arm whereby the reviewer was either blinded or non-blinded. Their result showed that blinding was 90% successful for the *Annals of Emergency Medicine* only. The average rate for the remaining four journals was 58%, with blinding failure significantly occurring when the authors were well known. They concluded that that blinding of reviewers to the identities of authors' did not improve the quality of reviews even when the analysis was restricted to successfully blinded manuscripts. Essentially, the same group that performed the study of Justice *et al* decided to evaluate differences in the success of blinding reviewers at seven biomedical journals. The percentage of reviewers successfully blinded was determined for three journals where blinding reviewers to authors' identities was a long-standing policy, and for four journals where there was no such policy (Cho et. al 1998). The success of blinding was not related to a journal's policy of blinding reviewers, but rather to the reviewers' research experience. But it is doubtful whether any journal would opt for less experienced reviewers to increase the success rate of a procedure which is largely ineffective.

In all the studies cited so far, it was only that of McNutt that rated blinding high. What was the reason or reasons for the significant effect of blinding on the quality of reviews reported by McNutt *et al* (1990)? El Munshid suggests that it could be because the authors and reviewers for the journal studied (Journal of General Internal Medicine) knew each other's research to a greater extent than for other journals, or the reason could be the way the review quality was assessed, and in any case, the level of significance was not high ($p<0.02$). Subsequent studies, which disproved the inevitability of blinding, incidentally involved more journals and larger samples and also employed somewhat different approaches.

On the other hands many studies have shown that open peer review will work. Van Rooyen et. al. (1993) performed a trial at the BMJ aimed at examining the effect of revealing the identities of reviewers to the authors. They sent consecutive manuscripts to two reviewers randomized to be identified or anonymous, and the quality of the reviews was assessed by two editors and the corresponding author who were blinded to the

intervention. The editors' evaluation was obtained for 113 out of 125 manuscripts and for 105 manuscripts in the case of the corresponding author. There were no significant differences between the anonymous reviews and those in which the reviewers' identities were revealed regarding quality, recommendation to publish, and the time taken to complete the review. However, the likelihood to decline was significantly higher when the reviewer was asked to consent to revealing his identity to authors. It was concluded that open peer review would be feasible at a large general medical journal.

Also, Walsh *et al* (2000) conducted a study devoted to examining the feasibility of an open peer review system at the *British Journal of Psychiatry*. The study involved 245 reviewers constituting 76% of those requested to participate, with consent to have their names revealed to the authors. A total of 408 submitted manuscripts were randomized to signed or unsigned reviewer groups. The quality of each review, its tone, recommendation to accept or reject and the time spent on it were assessed. Compared to unsigned reviews, those signed had higher quality, were more courteous, and took more time to complete; signers were also more likely to recommend publication. It was then concluded that open peer review would be feasible at a small specialized journal.

Thus, both studies agree on the feasibility of an open peer review system. Such a system would have the advantages of accountability, fairness and transparency. The quality of the reviews would not suffer and might rather be improved. On the other side of the argument is the probability that an open peer review system might lead to strained professional relationships, loss to the reviewer process of reviewers who decline to be identified, and increased number of manuscripts recommended for publication for the editors to consider.

The strong point in blinded review is the avoidance of bias often tied to the expectation that the author and the reviewers do not know themselves. But bias has been shown to always occur. Authors are very skilled persons, and have other caveats that could help unravel, to an extent, the likely identity of the authors of articles they review. For instance, development in content analysis of textual data show that it is possible to establish the author of an anonymous article, and this is an activity that has been happening intuitively before a formal scientific procedure was developed to establish it. Even the content of the article, the materials and methods, the subject matter, among others are sufficient to point the reviewer to the likely identity of the author, his institutional and geographical origin, or even any other information about the author. When reviewers are biased,

they hide under the cloak of blinded review process in which the author of a rejected article is lampooned to believe that his article has been given a fair chance, whereas it is not so. And so the author might put aside a good idea because s/he feels that the idea is not worth publishing. As a result, many good ideas would have been set aside or published in lower quality journals because they were originally assessed as unworthy of being published in high impact journals.

But open peer review will introduce some checks and balances. An author who feels that his/her article has not been given a fair chance could contest the report of a reviewer because the author and the reviewer might not be well disposed to each other. Furthermore, a reviewer knows that the author has his/her identity, and may therefore be wary of any assessments that are not based on objectivity. Moreover, open peer review will link the author with the reviewer. This is very important because the essence of an article is to share ideas and contribute to the stock of knowledge in an area. The author is not standing examination in which another author who, in his/her status as a reviewer, is the examiner. Every author is a reviewer, and every reviewer is an author.The credo of the publication and review process is to establish whether an article contributes to knowledge, and help the author organize his/her thoughts so that the content of the article can benefit members of the academic community. Let us now stratify the scientific community somewhat and see how open peer review could obtain within and, or among the communities.

The options for electronic peer review

Thus far, we have dealt with issues relating to the concept of peer review, highlighting the limitations of the manual process, blinding and other quality control measures. Let us now examine the options for undertaking aspects of peer review activities on the Net. We shall stratify the scientific community broadly as consisting of specific community and universal community, and then suggest how this open peer review system could obtain within each community.

Option One: Community Peer Review

A 'community' means a group of people with some shared element. A scientific community is usually a loosely knit community of scientists and researchers working on the same subject. Sometimes the term scientific community is also used to describe the community of all scientists (http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com). The community could be multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or intradisciplinary. A multidisciplinary

group consists of scientists from more than one discipline but their research strategy is usually the adoption of specific techniques and methodologies available in their various disciplines to solve problems. Typical examples could refer to the ubiquitous research groups that exist in several places, including Africa. The Africa Technology Policy Studies (ATPS), for instance, would want to know what people in other than engineering and related disciplines would contribute to the question of technology in Africa. Interdisciplinary groups have implications for the adoption of a single methodological technique irrespective of the disciplines of the participating scientists such as the activities of SIGMETRICS, focused on the application of informetric methods in the analysis of literature and related phenomena. Members are drawn from all disciplines but interest is mainly on the application of informetric tools in the analysis of literature and other related activities in, preferably, the field of expertise of the scientist. While, intradisciplinary groups often consist of scientists from the same discipline who may then be focusing on problems adopting methods suited to their subject specialties. The various professional and disciplinary associations can typify intradisciplinary research groups. Typical examples are the Computer Society of Nigeria, Nigerian Library Association, the African Council for Communication Education, etc.

Scientists naturally identify with relevant scientific communities. In this era of problem solving focus of science, scientists are expected to be multidisciplinary, and therefore often belong to more than one scientific community. Members of each scientific community often 'know' themselves, and are expected to meet regularly to discuss progress in their disciplines and other issues of interest. In recent times, this process has been eased by the existence of electronic listservs, which enable members of any scientific community to identify their members, their locations, and specific areas of specialization, among others.

Two methods of community open peer review can be suggested.

(i) Restricted Community Peer Review

In this model, the peer review of any article is restricted to selected members of the community whose expertise are either the same with, or is more closely related to, that of any scientist whose article is being assessed for publication. The articles sent to the journal are circulated to the selected members using the usual electronic medium. The scientists then review the article and return same to the journal editor, who in turn sends the reports to the author for possible revision or otherwise advise the author that the article was not accepted for publication. Except for the

electronic intermediation, this procedure nearly mimics exactly the process adopted in manual peer review. Another major difference anyway is that as expected, the peer review process is flexible, and the journal editor can therefore expand the number of persons to whom s/he sends a single article, thus increasing the spectrum of opinions that might improve the quality of articles a journal publishes. However, problems may arise when the number of reviewers is very large and the decision on publication of the article is tied to complete response from all the reviewers. A good practice, however, will be to define a threshold number of reviewers whose response is sufficient to decide on whether to publish or not.

(ii) Non-restrictive Scientific Community Open Peer Review
Irrespective of the subject specialization of scientists, members of the same academic community relatively share the same theoretical concepts and are therefore expected to be conversant with issues in each other's specialties. In a non-restrictive community of scientists, open peer review will refer to the inclusion of all members of a given community as peer reviewers. In this regard, every article sent to a journal for publication is distributed to all the members of the community for peer review. However, a threshold of the number of responses and the range of disciplines required suitable for taking decision on the article is defined. Although the size of this threshold is expected to be higher than the one in the previous model, the relative large size of the community would also be expected to cancel the chances of low reviewer response rates. Furthermore, there may be the fear that when scientists know that every member of the community is a reviewer of the same article, there may be some relaxation with respect to quick responses because 'another scientist will submit his or her own review'. But this limitation will not hamper the performance of this model because the compulsion to contribute one's opinion to a content that will be published in a journal is a pride of the scientist. Also, different scientists share wide varieties of opinions concerning even a single issue, and may want to use the opportunity to influence the content of the article. The advantages include the fact that the variety of reviewers' comments may cut across various subject areas in the discipline, thus reflecting a true 'community' in the right sense of the word.

Option Two: Universal Community Peer Review
In a sense, the whole communities of scientists in the world also constitute a single scientific community. Several scientists have shared different variants of this view at different times. For instance, Cameron (1997) has

called for a universal citation database and more that would link every work of science, and scientists together. This opinion is powered by the increasing consciousness that knowledge is just one single coin whose different faces are defined by factors associated with limitations of human beings and the need for specialization, among others. In this option, we can also identify two strategies.

(i) Restrictive Universal Open Peer Review
In this format, journal houses are a little more transgressive in restricting the disciplinary affiliations of their reviewers. Reviewers are selected from any of the scientific communities that have relevance with the expertise of the article under review. Articles that deposited at a designated venue are distributed to relevant scientists irrespective of their disciplines.

(ii) Non-restricted universal open peer review
In this strategy, the opinion of every scientist has potential utility in assessing an article. Hence, the article is deposited in a venue where every scientist can reach, irrespective of discipline. But this strategy may look clumsy to many people and for several reasons. First, sooner or later, there may be an avalanche of articles that are queuing for review. Second, there may be the fear that the articles posted for review might not receive the attention of any scientists. Third and very important, if the expected users of the article see it in advance, what will be the essence of further publishing the article? These and probably more may border the conventional manual paper review adherent. But scientists are selective of what they read, being busy persons themselves. Also, the fact that every scientist is given an equal opportunity to contribute to an upcoming publication somehow levels the peer review playing ground already macadamized in favour of some very visible scientists, institutions, gender, and regions. Harnard has suggested allowing "preprints" of articles to be available on the Internet prior to peer-reviewed publication. Physicists have followed this model for several years now, submitting articles to the e-print archive, maintained by Paul Ginsparg at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, in advance of, or instead of, print journals (Taubes 1996). Moreover, if multidisciplinarity is a universal strategy, then this approach will improve the chances of reflecting the opinions of scientists of all backgrounds in an article in order to improve its utility. Furthermore, an article is written for information and education, and scientists know this too well. An article that is undergoing peer review is so designated, and the one that is published is also indicated to have undergone peer review. This process is common in communities

where the distribution of preprints is a normal process in assessing the suitability of an article for publication.

Processing electronic peer review

We have indicated that the activities that go into the process of peer review can be computerised. There presently exists a variety of software tools that enable the electro nic management of peer review processes for electronic scholarly journals. These tools promise to facilitate efficient and centralized control of the submission, assignment, tracking and publication of articles through the web, as well as enabling a central archive of various tasks performed. Some programs keep all texts in on-line format throughout these processes, using multiple windows to allow reading, editing and on-line publication of articles, while others use automated program and email processes to exchange documents in standard formats.

A typical software program would consist of an author screen which allows authors to submit articles electronically. This screen should provide templates/instructions to authors and other stakeholders for submission, conversion and uploading of content in any format. There should also be automated notification screens which generate emails to editors and reviewers and authors notifying them of articles to be reviewed, reviews or edited copies available online. There is also the editor screen which allows editors to identify, read and notify or assign submitted articles to potential reviewers except when the article could be assigned automatically to reviewers. There also exists a reviewer screen which should enable the reviewers to read or receive articles, and then post or send their comments and suggested revisions to the editor or author. Depending on the option operated by the journal, an article is assigned to reviewers and tracked. The event logging enables the retrieval of list of appropriate editors and reviewers and tracks those who choose or who are assigned to particular articles. This makes it easy for checking the status of reviews. Very critically, the program should automate the assignment of reviewers based on article categories. In other words, nomination of reviewers should be automated. In a typical open and non-blinded peer review process, the identities of the authors and the reviewers are not hidden. Communication between the author and the reviewer is allowed, although tracked and logged. There should also be flexible authorization in which articles or reviews in process are made available to different users. The reason is because the reviewer may need the opinion of other experts who were not originally considered relevant. All through the process, there is a quality/category tags, which provide standard tags to enable the editors mark

pre-print articles for quality and proper classification. The software should also provide screens for writing and saving or sending finished review to editor. Some split-screens allow devices that can serve this purpose so that the reviewer views an excerpt of an article while writing his/her report by the side.

It is also possible for authors to choose whether their articles should be reviewed blind/doubleblind or open. The spoftware should contain enforcement nagging, which reminds the reviewer or even the author about deadlines for submission of reviews and also automatically sends email reminders. Editors are also alerted about completed, pending or overdue reviews, the number of reviewers' reports already received for a certain article, the characteristics and identities, recommendations regarding whether to publish or not, among others are logged for the editors to monitor. Finally, there should be automatic posting formats which publish articles that have received a proper number and quality of reviews. The software should also notify subscribers about the publication of a new article, contain summaries, abstracts, tips etc.

These suggestions sound too radical. But they show the potential for the Internet revolution today, and more importantly, the recommendations in this essay hold promise for the participation of developing countries scholars, especially African scholars, in mainstream scholarship.

Opportunities for mainstreaming developing countries' scientists

Several studies have shown that the participation of developing countries scientists in mainstream science is low (Nwagwu 2004). The reasons for this are often tied to the low quality of science in such regions, among other factors. There is a very low proportion of published articles creditable to authors from low income countries in many research fields, including psychiatry, cardiovascular disease, and epidemiology and HIV/AIDS. The above situation is despite the fact that the current global burden of infectious and parasitic diseases is heavily concentrated in the developing world. The large number of national and international initiatives that have been launched to improve the research capacities in developing countries in the recent years is evident. Crucial questions obviously arise. Why do scientists affiliated to countries with low or medium human development indexes seem to play less dominant roles in the research and control of tropical diseases, which affect them specifically? How then do they share their experiences and disseminate their findings in the peer reviewed international literature. What is the solution to the continued low representation of

developing countries scientists in international indexes? Answers to these questions cannot be sufficiently provided here. But it is sufficient to state that research into the diseases that affect persons from countries with low human development indices cannot be complete without the input of scientists from such countries. Based on interviews with more than 100 scientists and journal editors, Gibbs (1995) concluded that the near invisibility of less developed countries in scientific information may reflect not just the actual quality of third world research but also biases and economics of scientific publishing worldwide. More than economic, there is also the political angle to the low assessment of African and other developing region scholars. For instance, international citation indexes deliberately keep the number of developing countries sources they include in their indexes very low. The low level of indexing of sub-Saharan African health and biomedical journals in the world's leading bibliographic information sources, such as MEDLINE is a case in point. According to Lippman [year—citation], indexed articles related to Africa come from just over 1,160 different periodicals, of which only 14 (about 1.2%) are from Africa, and of the 14, seven are from South Africa. He further elaborated that most African publications are not indexed anywhere, since the 1.2% of indexed African literature does not include the wealth of research papers, reports by ministries and NGOs, theses and dissertations from African medical schools, and other fugitive literature that is often of primary importance. As a result, access to this information is inadequate. It is generally believed that 80% of the world consists of developing countries which encompass 24.1% of world's scientists and 5.3% of its research expenditure; and that these countries only show a participation of 2% in the indexed output of scientific information. Even within the region, there are scientists who have suggested that African science is published and more available elsewhere (Akhigbe 1990). The above positions cannot be altogether true. The simple fact is that African research output is not indexed locally as a basis for assessment of their science. The low state of science, the inward looking nature of publication in this region, and the expectation that scientists often address problems in their immediate environments, among others, support the expectation that scientific outputs are mainly published locally, and in sources that do not meet the requirements of the indexing services of West. As a result, developing countries input into mainstream science is rated low.

In recent times, a new dimension of the low participation of developing countries scientists has also been spotted. It relates to the fact that developing countries scientists do not also participate in the review of those

mainstream journals, which are the basis for their low assessment. Serious under-representation of developing countries scholars in the editorial and advisory board members has been documented recently. There are ubiquitous findings of imbalanced editorial and advisory boards of general medical and psychiatry journals to the literature on tropical medicine, for instance.

Electronic review will provide an unbiased platform. This platform will transform the process and structure of science so that researchers from developing countries can both respond and contribute to issues that relate to their local needs. It is also an opportunity for them to correct erroneous opinions and impressions about them, share their research findings, and compete with scholars from around the globe. This will definitely be a key factor in reducing the intolerable burden of infectious and parasitic diseases that continue to affect poor people worldwide disproportionately and might consequently be an important strategy towards improving the participation of developing countries in international science.

Conclusion

No doubt, this paper might have raised more questions than answers. What about the publishers? Won't journal articles become so easy to write? Won't the status of the author be compromised? Will there not be a long list of reviewers' comments, which may delay the revision of an article, and also probably subsequently infringe on the advantage of the speed with the electronic process? Will there not be contrasting views concerning the content of the article, which may further confuse the author? What about journal ownership? How will the editor be remunerated? How will the users of the e- journal pay for the journal services? What will happen to the publisher, the copyright question, and so on? The fact is that a new era has dawned on us- the electronic era- and this era carries with it challenges for human beings to reorganise and restructure the way we live, think and do things. If the Guttenberg machine displaced the historical manual copyists, then who and what should be displaced by electronic peer review should not be a central focus.

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Book Review

Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (Editors), 2006, *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*. New York: Orbis Books, 2006, 278 pages.

Reviewed by Eddah Mutua-Kombo*

This book, a collection of essays, edited by Phiri and Nadar, focuses on the traditional understanding of women of Africa. The thirteen authors (eleven Africans) address two critical issues—health and religion—, and the extent to which these issues affect the daily lives of African women. While the book does not 'speak' directly to communication studies, it should be seen as an opportunity to enrich the capacity of African communication scholars to rethink ways to develop African knowledge that are grounded in understanding cultural patterns and communication styles of African women. This should become part of the discourse in our field. In one sense, we can develop and expand African knowledge by acknowledging and sharing the numerous ways that different disciplines inform each other about current research on issues that affect African people. Such interdisciplinary discourse would contribute to scholars reclaiming the centrality of African cosmology in shaping how we produce and promote African knowledge in its various manifestations.

The thirteen essays in this book focus on the life of Professor Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye, a woman they all had shared experiences with. Professor Oduyoye is the founder of the 'Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians', a gathering of African women theologians. Circle members comprise of women who are rooted in Islam, Christianity and African traditional religions (20). There are four parts to the book, all devoting space to address diverse issues that form a complicated public and private discourse, and have gendered implications for

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human progress and in particular women and development in Africa. The wide range of topics discussed in this book reveal the diverse nature of the subjects and issues these women have come to address in their lives—sexual violence, gender discrimination and inequality, HIV/AIDS, poverty, effects of Structural Adjustment Programs, war and conflict, and oppressive religious and cultural practices that limit women's capacity to function in society. The women also focused on knowledge and wealth creation.

Dube's essay, for example, presents a sound critique of the structural epistemology 'that assumes that the West holds the best answers for the whole world-civilization, progress, language, science, faith, its brand of democracy, medicine, law, education, environmental care, development and freedom'(134). She argues that African cosmology was robbed of creatively informing its own communities about the prevention of HIV/AIDS. The effect was that the epidemic seemed distanced from the people since it was scientifically discovered in the West by the West. This view got people to self-distance themselves from the disease, a factor that has become deadly on the African continent.

As a communication scholar with a research interest in women, I resonated well with the book's running theme which is a celebration of women's resistance from silence to voice. The book reminds us all of the importance of recognizing and acknowledging different ways of knowing. There might be other books out there written by African women but this is really the first in my view that breaks the silence of the taboo topics in Africa (e.g. sexuality, childlessness). The essayists are women who would not be expected by virtue of their strong Christian or Catholic upbringing, training and work in theology, and above all by the African culture to outwardly challenge patriarchy. They agree that it was not easy to engage in open dialogue 15 years ago but they have grown to the point where they can freely name and language their issues.

The essayists honor Professor Oduyoye for empowering them to move from silence to voice. The voice that the women present in this book is one that is well grounded in a sound array of theoretical frameworks-feminist, Africanist, theological, womanist-that illuminate and problematize socio-cultural, political, and economic institutions which are often the basis of African women's subordination. All the essays inform us of the centrality of women's knowledge; its power and worth in transforming conditions that women of Africa face in life. The use of personal narratives allows the essayists to get to a place in their personal lives where no one has been before apart from themselves. This journey whose product

is this very thought provoking book reveals that women creating their own knowledge is a way to liberate themselves from the deep pains of silence.

The essayists make it clear to their readers that African scholars have to place Christianity and its sister/ brother colonialism at the center of the analyses of how both institutions have transformed the way Africans lead their lives and construct their knowledge on a daily basis. A point made clear is that there is a need to rethink knowledge construction. What the women share in the essays is what they have learned from Prof. Oduyoye's writings and mentoring leading them to reach a place where they can recreate themselves and name their issues in a very candid way. The essay titled 'wise woman bearing gifts' talks about how Prof. Oduyoye has helped women of Africa to create their own theology. It includes a quote from her book: *The will to arise: women, traditions and the church in Africa* (1992) that has inspired others to reclaim their knowledge and to recreate the self. She asserts that 'African women theologians have come to realize that as long as men and foreign researchers remain the authorities on culture, rituals and religion, African women will continue to be spoken of as if they were dead'(55).

This book brings value added knowledge to those interested in issues that affect the people we love the most; our mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, nieces and wives. My initial expectations that the book might not present the issues a certain way (and what way is this?-the way that shrouds women's pain and suffering) were wrong. I found that the essays contain valuable and noble ideas about how African women through the 'Circle' have broken the ranks of the theology of inculturation and began to talk about taboo topics in public. Njoroge's essay 'power of naming' is inspired by Professor Oduyoye's boldness to talk about her own childlessness. She notes that Professor Oduyoye has empowered women to talk about those taboo topics that cause injustice, indignity and human suffering. She references Professor Oduyoye's assertion that 'the silence that shrouds the issue of childlessness compounds its potential for the disempowering of women'. Njoroge argues that by writing from her experience, Professor Oduyoye has broken one chain of conspiracy that patriarchy and its collaborators sexism, use to debase women's identity and dignity. The uncovering of the taboo topics would not be possible if Professor Oduyoye and the circle women had not made an active and deliberate effort to construct new ways of naming the pain and loss women face in the context of injustice, indignity and suffering.

The book's strength as an edited volume lies in the manner in which it carries diversity of views, and a wide range of topics and diverse experi-

ences. It is grounded on Christian theology, feminist and womanist thought, and yet remains firmly rooted in African cosmology. The presentation of the arguments developed clearly reveal the basis of what shapes women's discourse patterns, that is, their shared experiences which bring them together in the 'circle' to negotiate these experiences and then, create and share their meaning to other women and the world.

The last essay titled 'From Mere Existence to Tenacious Endurance' highlights the benefits that come with women's endurance to live and thrive. It promotes the notion of continued existence which is the 'ability to last without giving way'. This affords dignity and meaning to women's lives that is enhanced by the knowledge that women recreate for themselves. The analysis of the issues discussed is eminently applicable to scholars and students interested in the development and integration of 'African knowledge' into the evolving global knowledge economy. Additionally, the analysis also highlights the issues that communication educators need to make part of their discourse about expanding communication education in Africa.

African educators and researchers will find this book useful in number of ways. First, it helps them examine their standpoint in relation to women, health and religion in the context of indigenizing African knowledge. Second, it offers educators a way to enhance their pedagogical approach to development issues in Africa. For example, the discussion on pedagogical approaches to HIV/AIDS was very enlightening. Dube's essay proposes community-oriented pedagogy for HIV/AIDS prevention that must be preceded by a curriculum transformation that seeks to decolonize the place, the approach and the content of the syllabus and programs. She adds that these changes must be informed by African cosmology.